

Where No One Goes

by Nagareboshi Star

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Summary: It was their home, and their dragons, and Hiccup, now chief, was prepared to do anything he had to in order to protect his own. For that was a lesson his father had taught him. Yet despite the new-found peace, secrets lurked behind the corner, and in between marriage proposals and chief-tasks, the true history of dragons began to unveil itself. And with it their future. Post-HTTYD2

1. Chapter 1

A/N: After having seen **HTTYD2** and several investigations on what's going to happen next, as well as reading between the lines during the movie and the tear-bringing hint **Dean** **Deblois** gave us, I kind of had my imagination run wild.

Aaand here is what it came up with. This is, more or less, my version of how it'll continue. So, before 2017 rolls by, have some fun with this!

A lot of **Hiccstrid** and **Hiccup/Toothless** bonding shall await you!

_Disclaimer: TITLE DEDICATED TO THE AWESOME SOUNDTRACK BY JONSI! **

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><p>"There used to be dragons when I was a boy..."

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><p>Chapter One

"Astrid, I need to talk to you." Frowning, he shut his eyes tightly,

wincing at the pathetic sound of his rather nervous voice, "Astrid, there is something I need to ask you...no..."

He dived his right hand through his hair, shaking up the short, auburn locks and thus trying to soothe his throbbing head. Everything felt so painful and tight, as if his brain were attempting to burst free from the skull, in doing so gaining much needed space and air.

"Hey Astrid, can we talk over there for a minute...like...because..."

Hiccup sighed at the wall in front of him, pressing his lips together sternly to form a straight line.

There hung a charcoal drawing of Toothless, which he had created not too long ago on a large piece of patched, spotty paper.

Said dragon had decided to nap peacefully on top of a Viking hut only five feet from a few sharp cliffs, which fell down dangerously into the tossing, impatient oceans.

His perfect balance and nonchalance towards the imminent threat regardless of the fact that Hiccup had removed his vital tail-fin for some maintenance had astounded the young chief.

Despite all the suffocating stress around him, contentment seeped through his veins upon the sight, thus calling for him to quickly gather some of his makeshift map pages, using it instead to draw a rather large and accurate portrait of his black companion.

Astrid had pronounced how detailed it was in comparison to his usual sketches, with all the fine scales etched in, the play of light and shadow being perfectly imprinted together with every little bump and crevice the dragon possessed.

She had told him to eternalise it into burned wood, or even stone if he found the patience and time to do so.

Which lately, he did not.

Being a chief was the most demanding job Hiccup could have ever imagined.

And he had often imagined it.

Everytime Stoick had tried to touch the delicate subject of succession, Hiccup had perfectly manoeuvred a vocal way out of the speech he was bound to get and thus always managed to avoid the consequences. He did not want to hear his father's suggestion of Hiccup taking over. The thought had frightened him too much.

Hiccup had felt a pang of guilt each time, partly because he knew his deceased father had spent a lot of time contemplating that move as well planning the speech, yet Hiccup did not deem himself strong enough for the job.

There were days where Hiccup believed himself to be a coward.

He only wished his father could be here right now, not only to help

him out with all the problematic situations he faced due to his new position, but also to _see_ him in his new position.

Stoick would be proud; his mother always reminded him of that since the end of the war against Drago and his Bewilderbeast one month ago.

Once more, a tired sigh escaped his dry lips.

How could his father have much pride for a son that barely coped with the frustrating tasks a chief faced daily?

Even now, knowing _who_ he was, it felt like too much. But he owed it to his father; to the _world_. _He_ had to try and unite humans and dragons in such a way that the thought of war would _forever_ be abandoned.

Hence, with such a grand and weighty task ahead, why did this _current_ ordeal seem _so_ much more difficult?

Mustering up all the strength and authority he knew was hidden somewhere within him, he puffed out air, emerald eyes glaring holes at Toothless' left ear as he spoke to himself: "Astrid, can I have a moment?"

"Sure, but...why are you asking the picture that?"

His heart twisted as it flipped violently within his chest, causing the hairs on his body to stand on edge as his orbs widened dramatically.

Oh..._God Thor..._

"A-Astrid!" Hiccup exclaimed with fake cheer as he turned around to face the blonde Viking, who stood with a curious yet amused expression marred across her face, "I was just..._thinking_ of you aloud!"

Blinking several times in confusion and giving her opposite a further ten seconds of wondrous staring, all the while grinning, Astrid shook her head, shrugging, "Okay, well, I was gonna ask where you have been."

"You seem to ask that a lot...lately..." What he had intended to be a harmless joke ended up as being a stupid remark.

_'_Of course __she's always asking where you've been, idiot, because you haven't seen her in ages since you took up the position of the chief.' _

Once more, the burning sensation of what Hiccup understood as _guilt_ spread through his body, making his heart clench angrily this time.

Nothing did he love more than mapping the world together with his girlfriend and his dragon, searching for every unknown realm and species that the archipelago had to offer. They fooled around, smiled and laughed as they mocked and teased each other playfully, discovering new secrets and expanding their knowledge drastically.

How envious Fishlegs sometimes was when Hiccup told him about their accomplishments. He always tried to figure out the speed, strength and size of every dragon they described or sketched out.

Together with Toothless, Hiccup forgot about the burdens everyday life brought with it, and with Astrid by his side the joy doubled.

The sense of freedom, tranquillity and inner peace was something he would not trade in a million years.

Yet here he was, doing just that.

'I feel like a liar...'

"You know...Chief stuff." Hiccup shrugged, throwing a half-hearted smile at her.

To his surprise, Astrid returned a smile of her own, understanding his daily frustrations all too well.

She was not going to start and question what being a chief had to do with staring at a self-drawn picture of your best friend and talking to yourself.

"I'm...sorry to interrupt your work right now," she could not help the irritated frown; he had spoken her name several times after she had entered his house, in search of him, and she did not know why, "but there is something Valka wants to show you."

Upon hearing the name of his mother, Hiccup's face lightened up.

Knowing just how similar they both were, with their fascination for dragons and skill at taming them, Hiccup felt truthfully understood. He had finally found out why he had been so different all his life, and that made him no longer feel like an outcast, but rather special.

"Alright, lead the way." He trudged excitedly behind the blonde Viking as she moved to walk towards the door.

Just as she opened it to reveal the bright, cold afternoon which Berk now faced, Hiccup halted in his steps, suddenly remembering what he had originally wanted to talk to Astrid about.

He could feel the sweat accumulate above his brow as he furrowed them, unsure what he should do first.

"Astrid..." his lips uttered before he could stop himself.

Said girl turned to glance over her shoulder, curiously staring at her boyfriend. She hoped she would finally find out what Hiccup had been babbling incoherently about earlier on. She did not like it when he kept secrets from her. Neither did she appreciate the fact that she had hardly seen him this last month.

There were the occasional dragon races, of course, and a few moments which were, however, always related to chief stuff.

Their normal, intimate times together seemed replaced by heavy duty and difficult problems which had to be solved.

Like rebuilding Berk.

Astrid knew just how much Hiccup seemed to be struggling lately, and that he wished for nothing more than to jump onto Toothless' back and fly away for an hour or two, maybe more, but that he could not.

A chief had to protect his own. It was a rule Hiccup was now adamant about, after everything that had occurred. And the young Hofferson understood that like no one else.

Thus, she was rather eager to present him with her new concept for dragon races which she and Fishlegs had come up with in the last few days. She knew with certainty that he would be thrilled and thankful for the recommendation and change.

She also knew that her whole planning and plotting was not complete yet, and that, in order to get to Valka, they would inevitably fly past the academy.

Astrid had to be sneaky if she wanted to keep him from discovering her intrigue. Suddenly, it was her turn to frown, however in concentration, as she worked out the best route they could take.

"I...I wanted to...as-"

"Hiccup!"

Rudely interrupted in the middle of his strenuous endeavour, Hiccup sighed defeatedly, glancing towards the exit of his house where the young Jorgenson was currently approaching.

"What is it, Snotlout?" his annoyed tone was quite palpable; Astrid could tell as she turned to face their comrade too.

Yet nothing deterred Snotlout much.

"I have a problem I need to pronounce!"

Astrid gradually folded her arms in front of her chest, eyeing the boy carefully as she mustered her best glare, "Snotlout, if this is about the Thawfest games again I'm going to personally-"

"But it's a serious situation!" The young rider proclaimed, raising his hands in front of him, "I'm trying to prepare for them within the arena seeing as Thawfest is just around the corner-"

"Five months."

"-but those stupid twins are burning down all my training gear with their stupid double-headed dragon! Hookfang even joined in now!"

He now had a glare of his own expressed on his face as he lamented over his predicament.

Hiccup shook his head, now standing next to his girlfriend, "Snotlout,

we have more serious problems than your training difficulties; we need to repair all of Berk and help our people. We are facing hard times and need to work _together_."

"I'm _trying_ to do just _that_. The people of Berk will be so happy to see me winning in all glory at the Thawfest games, so for me to be in top shape I need to train _now_."

"Is that what your father tells you, 'cause it sounds like the idea of a mutton-head." Astrid threw in, feeling her patience run thin.

"Very funny Astrid. _No_, it's a logical assumption I have come up with _all_ by myself!" He pointed his finger repeatedly at his chest, scowling at the Hoffererson heir, "And with your stupid preparations all around the aren-"

"Aaalright, enough for today!" As speedily as she could, she pushed forward and shoved Snotlout a good two feet backwards, "How about you go do something _actually_ useful for our people, like getting your Monstrous Nightmare to burn down the huge ice spears that are currently making Berk inhabitable."

"But-"

"Go on, take the twins with you, stop wasting our precious time." Shoving him further and further as Snotlout struggled, looking a little devastated, Astrid finally turned back to the young chief, "Come on, Hiccup."

Confused, the boy nodded slowly, finally exiting his house.

The moment he stepped outside, a dark, rapid shadow engulfed him and before he knew it he was knocked to the ground roughly, something heavy placed on top of his chest.

He opened his eyes, which he had shut in pain beforehand, only to feel himself being blinded by thick, moist slime.

"T-Toothless!" He half-laughed as his onyx dragon licked his face happily, growling and grunting with glee upon seeing his beloved rider.

Hiccup pushed him off, rolling to his side and getting to his feet with the help of a giggling Astrid.

The Night Fury stood expectantly in front of him, large dark pupils sparkling with joy.

"We just came back together, I took him with me seeing as you were busy in the Meade hall earlier on." Astrid explained, smiling at the black dragon who now tried to nuzzle Hiccup.

Said boy was trying to free his face from the sticky spit.

"I missed you too, bud." He quickly patted Toothless on the head, who appreciated the gesture greatly.

It was ironic to consider that, merely five years ago, an encounter like this would have been unthinkable and would most certainly have

ended in the death of either of them.

Hiccup was glad times had changed, and that he now had Toothless to count on " anytime he needed the aid of his black counterpart, he knew he'd get it.

And no matter what happened, so the chief thought as he stroked the side of the dragon's face, he would always hold his back, too " no one would hurt Toothless.

Not as long as Hiccup had a say.

"Alright, then let's go." He nodded towards Astrid, who returned the gesture, glancing upwards into the sky before whistling with her two fingers placed inside her lips.

Upon the shrill call, an even shriller Deadly Nadder answered.

Stormfly landed elegantly beside her mistress, waiting for her to climb onto her back, "Let's get going!"

Both riders took off into the heavens.

* * *

><p>"So, what were you going to ask me earlier on?" Astrid called over to him as she steered Stormfly to glide a little bit closer to Toothless, careful as to not collide as she flapped her wings to maintain some distance.<p>

They were currently soaring over the vast, roaring ocean, past a few cliffs and stone constructions mother nature had conjured, heading towards Dragon Island.

It was the very island where Hiccup had battled the Red Death over five years ago.

Surprised at the sudden start of a conversation, seeing as they had been flying in silence for over ten minutes, Hiccup felt himself stutter.

"E-Erm...well...i-it's not really something I can just tell you like this." He could feel the heat seep into his cheeks, the urge to rub his neck tickled in his hand, yet he fought against it.

He did not want to display his nervousness so openly in front of Astrid. It would only give him away.

Yet said girl frowned upon his secrecy, sighing in annoyance, "Hiccup" she called his name sternly, causing the young Viking to jump a little in his saddle and glance over at her, "what's _wrong_?"

He could tell the pain and feeling of rejection within her gleaming eyes. She obviously felt left out out of his life; this past month, Hiccup had been facing an inner battle he, for some inexplicable reason, decided to keep to himself, instead of involving his ever-helpful girlfriend, as was usually his habit.

There were no barriers between the two since they started being a couple. Whenever Hiccup had something on his mind, Astrid would be the first person to know, beside Toothless, of course, who could feel his best friend's distress all the time.

And whenever _she_ had a trouble plaguing her, which actually happened more often than the girl liked to admit, Astrid would confide in Hiccup, albeit reluctantly.

He remembered the first time she faced an inner turbulence he knew nothing of, but could tell by the look of anguish she openly displayed. It had taken him nearly a whole day, talking into her uninterruptedly, before she mumbled along and allowed for his assistance.

Granted, she had felt so relieved when she had told Hiccup, and suddenly, it seemed as if they were a lot closer; like there was a deep understanding between them only they could grasp, and no one else.

It was ever since that moment Astrid felt truthfully blessed to be by Hiccup's side, and yearned for his company whenever she was not.

Such unaccustomed, strange and rather irritating sentiments were not welcome at first, of course, seeing as she used to be too proud for her own good.

Yet once she overcame her sense of weakness, she realised just how well the change did her.

Now she was more than glad about it. These feelings made her stomach flutter as if thousands of tiny Terrible Terrors housed within it, and the thought made her smile.

Right now, however, she felt _anything_ but happiness, "You used to tell me everything, like_, one bloody month ago_. And now you are all keeping to yourself. You can't tell me that being chief means not talking to your girlfriend about what troubles you."

"That's not it!" He balled his fists tightly, feeling the leather rub into his skin harshly, "I just...I can't..." he flung both hands up into the air, sighing with aggravation.

How could he tell her what was troubling him, if the very thing plaguing his mind _was_ _her?_

Not in a negative way; far from it. But this last month things had changed so drastically Hiccup felt like his head had popped off several times and left him; _everything_ was so different, and there were so many decisions to make.

He forgot most of the things he was supposed to do; like writing out scrolls with important documentations, overseeing the trade and commerce in and around Berk, memorizing the desired saddles of each Viking and even trivial things like eating, sleeping or thinking up the next speech he had to hold in front of the civilians when Snoggletog arrived.

The lack of Astrid's presence, however, was felt and noticed the very

moment it occurred.

Suddenly, the auburn-haired boy was surrounded by hundreds of demanding Viking's with personal problems they wanted to exclaim and Astrid was no where in sight.

If she had left due to the suffocating crowd within the hall, or had gone under in the masses; Hiccup did not know. Fact was, she was gone, and seeing her became rarer and rarer. He felt pained, and lonely, horrible as well as ignorant for some reason.

Toothless would always nuzzle him then, trying to cheer him up with one of his makeshift grins; and whilst Hiccup did twist his lips upwards a little, pressing his forehead to that of his dragon, it never lasted long enough.

That was when he knew it; realised what he had to do in order to keep Astrid around him everyday, the only way they would work as a team once more because everyone around Berk would expect them to. How they could be a couple without much hindrance, despite all the day-to-day chief-problems Hiccup now faced.

And the thought thrilled him immensely, as well as caused his knees to buckle like on the day he had first met Toothless.

Obviously pissed off by now that Hiccup was simply remaining silent and not confiding in her, Astrid growled in a very unfeminine way, steering Stormfly away from Toothless, who at first did not like that idea, before calling for her to fly higher and take a detour towards Dragon Island.

Hiccup watched remorsefully as she flew away, having had enough of him and his secrecy and wanting some alone time.

And as it happened so frequently since the rise of the sun this day, he sighed, feeling his heavy heart sink a little further within his chest.

The sympathetic wail of his scaly friend, who could feel Hiccup's sorrow, soothed him a little, and he patted his head affectionately, "Come on bud, let's hurry to mom."

* * *

><p>Astrid was already there when Hiccup arrived. She avoided looking at him, keeping a rather emotionless expression plastered to her face as she talked hectically with Valka, hands on her hips.<p>

His mother smiled with strong affection, glad to see him having finally arrived, and Cloudjumper, who stood idly behind her, glanced with curiosity at the young Viking, and then bowed down in respect towards Toothless as said dragon approached.

He loved all the attention he was receiving ever since he became the alpha, for he broadened his shoulders and levelled his head.

"Son, good to see you." Hiccup hopped off of Toothless' back and trudged towards her, giving her a brief hug.

"What's the matter?" He questioned, swallowing thickly, trying to

ignore the tense situation he and Astrid currently underwent.

Suddenly, his mother's loving expression was replaced by one of concern. She diverted her eyes towards the ground thoughtfully, "Let me show you." and then she turned, patting Cloudjumper as they walked across a large plain towards the forests.

Enwrapped in silence for several long minutes, they trudged in between the dark, clustered trees, over small hills and through tiny trickling creeks.

Just as he was about to question where exactly they were headed, Valka stopped abruptly.

He struggled to look past her, seeing as his mother was quite a bit taller than him, so he stepped to the side.

Toothless too halted, sitting down and twisting his head quizzically at the sight in front of them.

There, next to a splintered, fallen tree, leaves and branches scattered in a hazardous manner, lay a whimpering Timberjack, barely moving at all.

By the small size of it, it must have been a baby, having gotten somehow separated from his mother.

Now Hiccup knew just how dangerous separating a mother dragon from her child could get.

He did not want to reconsider the terrible state the forests were in back when he had found Torch.

"What happened to it?" He asked softly, moving with careful, slow steps towards the infant whilst stretching out a comforting hand.

"Careful Hiccup! Their wings are razor sharp, he could slice your hand off if he wanted to." His mother warned worriedly, stepping beside him and placing a hand onto his shoulder.

"I know, I'm careful." He whispered, continuing to approach the small being.

The dragon hissed in a furious attempt at scaring Hiccup away, trying to scurry deeper into the forest but finding himself too weak. He hissed some more and roared with his underdeveloped voice, wriggling his snake-like body.

"It's okay little one, I'm your friend." His fingers were millimetres from approaching the Jack's head, the dragon already snapping warningly.

At this, Toothless came forward, growling as he bared his teeth at the baby, telling him in dragon-language to watch his mouth and show some respect.

Hiccup could see the Timberjack gradually averting his attention towards the Night Fury, and knowing that one glance at Toothless'

penetrating glare would call for even his immediate obedience, he raised his hand and placed it in front of him.

"No, don't Toothless. Let me tame him." Surprised at that, Toothless shut his maw, tilting his head in puzzlement as now dilated orbs watched his rider inquisitively.

The young chief reached out with his hand once more, observing as the Timberjack continued to grunt and attempt to wriggle away, yet when his hand neared his face, the small, frightful being suddenly tensed, before relaxing.

He sniffed the skin several times, inspecting it curiously before he allowed Hiccup to touch him.

"Good boy." Both women behind him sighed with relief.

It was now that Hiccup got to see the deeply etched scars across its main body, evidently having been caused by some sort of trap.

'A trap...' His eyes widened with realisation, and he turned around to face his mother.

"There must still be some traps scattered around here to lure the dragons in. He was merely a late victim." Valka uttered, presenting her son with a a serious, concerned expression.

"Then we need to find them all and remove them. We have done that before, ages ago, with all the traps we Berkians used to spread when we were still at war with the dragons." It was the first time since their disagreement that Astrid spoke, and Hiccup was glad to hear her voice.

Valka nodded, her large staff raised as she walked back towards Cloudjumper, who, together with Stormfly, had stayed behind Toothless.

"But it is dangerous nonetheless, even for expert dragon riders. We need to be careful, and the Berkians should not fly too far out, seeing as there are traps even so close to home."

"Well, I know one man who'd be perfect for the job then." Hiccup got up and straightened himself, determined as he stared at both women.

Astrid nodded in understanding, "Of course, he'll know perfectly well how to deal with them."

The elder lady gazed inquiringly between the two, not knowing who they meant.

"We should not leave him out here all alone; let's take him back to Berk with us." Hiccup pronounced, stepping slowly towards the little dragon before he gently picked him up, wary of the wings.

The being barely had any energy left to flap them.

"What about the mother?" Astrid questioned.

"I fear she will not return." Valka answered, sorrowful, dark eyes

glanced upwards at the sky thoughtfully.

Astrid was about to inquire how she knew, but feared somehow that she would not appreciate the answer.

"Here, let me take him to Gothi; she'll be able to treat him." The blonde Viking stepped forward, grabbing a small tattered blanket from Stormfly's satchel which she held out in her hands.

Hiccup gently placed the being into her arms, wrapping him up within the blanket so that Astrid would not injure herself.

There was a curt moment where the dragon struggled to adjust, and both Vikings feared he would tumble out of her hold. Astrid stepped forward slightly as Hiccup pushed him up gently, causing both their faces to be only millimetres apart.

As Hiccup and Astrid glanced up simultaneously, they froze in their actions, staring at each other for several, fast-paced seconds before Hiccup stepped away, rubbing the back of his neck and watching out of the corner of his eyes how Astrid avoided his gaze.

"Good, I'll...take my leave then." She smiled weakly, turning towards Stormfly and climbing on top before both rider and dragon sailed off into the sky and back home.

Hiccup sighed as he watched her leave.

Meanwhile, Valka had observed their peculiar and somewhat foreign interaction, intrigued by the reason why both seemed so tense.

Usually, Hiccup was loose, relaxed and content whenever he spent time with his beloved girlfriend; they both were an incredible team, always working together, acting all intimate and lovingly with one another.

Yet this seemed a little very different.

Just as he was about to turn towards Toothless and take off himself, knowing exactly in his mind whom he had to talk to now, Valka stopped him.

"Hiccup...?" He turned his head towards her, one hand resting on top of Toothless' snout, "Is there...a problem?" She twisted her head curiously, glancing back up at the sky where Astrid had been merely seconds ago.

Somehow irked by the fact that his mother had caught onto their stressful situation, Hiccup's eyes widened as he began to mumble.

"Err...no! No! Everything's...alright!"

Yet her imminent frown caused the boy to falter with his words, "Alright...well...we are kind of having some problems right now." He did not want to look his mother in the eye; he felt too embarrassed to be currently approaching that topic.

Her silence, he knew, was a sign for him to continue with his

explanation.

Hiccup scratched his head, glancing into the deep parts of the forest, "We...didn't get to spend much time with each other this last month and...she...thinks I'm keeping secrets from...her." Why was it so hard to talk to his mother about it?

Maybe because he was so used to his father usually helping him out with such predicaments?

Probably.

Valka raised an eyebrow at him, "And, are you keeping secrets from her?"

The question caught him off guard. He did not expect her to be questioning his honesty.

He could only presume it was a mother-kind-of-thing to be able to tell when something burdened your child.

"...Not really, I-I mean, sort of, but...I just can't tell her! I mean, not yet! Not unless I find the perfect moment to propo-"

"Marry..." his mother breathed out, eyes wide with astonishment, "You...you want to marry her." Her face brightened immediately.

She really was damn clever, mother-instincts or whatever, "Yeah. You know, being chief and all...I-I mean dad said part of being a chief was to settle down with your own family, a-and with Astrid as my wife she'd be around me more often, doing chief stuff with me, so we'd see each other a lot and..." his cheeks were so vibrantly hot he was sure they had the colour of Gobber's hearth whenever Grump left it to burn down to embers.

He suddenly heard his mother's light-hearted laughter.

She smiled understandingly at her son, stepping forward to place a comforting hand onto his shoulder, "It is a great decision, my boy, I cannot imagine any other woman more suiting for you than her."

Hiccup pressed his lips together, feeling them curl upwards, "Thanks mom. I'm glad you think so." Yet once more a sigh ran past his lips, "But still. I don't know how to approach it. I mean..."

"I understand. One of the many prideful stories a Viking has to tell is how he managed to woo his wife." She now gently placed both hands around his face, stroking his cheek affectionately, "You'll find the right moment, son, just be patient."

She kissed him on the forehead, smiling some more before Valka turned towards Cloudjumper, giving her boy a nod as they both now flew away and into the distance.

Hiccup stared at their retreating forms for several minutes, feeling Toothless nudge his side comfortingly.

"Yeah bud, I know. Today's not my day..."

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><p>AN: I really hope you enjoyed this, guys. And I'd appreciate it terribly much if you __**reviewed.**_

_If you **want** to read the **next** **chapter** and see this continue with all its twists (for I have many chapters written already), just **REVIEW** with a **"yes"** or anything to show me that! So that I know it's worth posting at all. Otherwise it might die within my computer folders...
>

I love your opinion (as long as it's not bashing)

Thanks!

2. Chapter 2

A/N: Here comes a big **THANK YOU** to all you lovely people who reviewed the first chapter and desired for the second to be uploaded.

This is a lot of fun to write, really, and I'm pouring my heart-blood into it. So your feedback is appreciated A LOT.

_Here comes chapter 2. Enjoy, and don't forget to **review** at the end (even if it's only a word :)) **
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><p>Chapter 2

Walking along the foresty area of Dragon Island together with Toothless, Hiccup was suddenly reminded of the day he and Astrid had officially become a couple. It had definitely been one of the best days of his life; after all, he had admired her strongly since the day he first set eyes on her, many years ago.

But all those years she ignored him; not acknowledging his presence as she was busy training in how to fight and become the perfect Viking dragon-slayer. It was not until they had turned four, when she actually looked at him as he stood there in the workshop, Gobber having gone to fetch some item.

She asked with an irritated expression what he was doing there, and he answered that Gobber was teaching him the art of smithery. After that curt encounter, she shrugged, returning to her training.

Afterwards, Hiccup was only capable of regarding her from afar â€" watching her briefly interact with the other kids their age, ignoring every offer of friendship and preferring to practice and work on her own.

There had been one occasion, during a dragon attack, where Hiccup had rushed with a bucket of water to put out the fire that encased the

workshop, wanting to splash it against one of the walls when he tripped over a rock and tumbled, the bucket flying out of his grasp.

He crashed to the ground, the contents of the bucket emptying itself all over him and drenching the boy in salty sea water. Astrid had stood before him all of a sudden, eyeing the boy with a detached expression before trudging towards him, reaching out her hand so that she may aid Hiccup up.

He took it, nervously thanking her and grinning before she turned and walked away again.

Hiccup never quite knew what to make out of her. She was a puzzling character; evidently very prideful and desiring nothing but her own, personal glory as well as respect. She had always aimed for approval; from everyone and herself.

Their interactions had only become more frequent when they both started at the academy – at first, she was his fiery rival, hating his spotlight attention, before soon turning into his loyal companion.

He sometimes could not believe the extreme change they both had undergone. Him, the dragon-riding, authoritative chief; she, the strong, glamorous and vibrant woman who did not mind standing behind Hiccup when it came to certain skill and power. No, instead, she admired him just as much as he did her.

And when they finally, after all those years, announced their feelings for each other, and Hiccup asked her to become his girlfriend the way he had daydreamed since that day at the workshop when he was four, he was more than exhilarated when she had said yes.

Toothless had shot a fiery purple bolt into the sky, roaring with glee upon the sight of his happy rider.

Gobber had been working in the back of the workshop all idly by himself when Hiccup and Astrid returned from another mapping journey, landing in the middle of the town's marketplace.

Hiccup exclaimed that he was going to escort her home, but the scolding glare she gave him told him to stay put, preferably.

Instead, he actually dared to do something he never imagined he'd be doing in all of his life – simply because he felt like courage always failed him. He leaned down and pecked her on the lips, earning an approving smile from his opposite, before she and Stormfly left.

"Beautiful night for some flying, ey?" He suddenly heard Gobber chuckle as he inspected a piece of metal in his hand.

Shocked as he realised Gobber had seen their little interaction, Hiccup turned nervously to the elder Viking, who was now using a cleaning cloth to swipe the metal.

"Hey... Gobber...!" Hiccup slowly approached him, Toothless legging

it inside the shop and watching with interest what Gobber did with the shiny instrument, "What're you doing here so late at night?"

"Aah, y'know, when I can't sleep I tend to work in order to free my head. Or when some overly annoying chief who does not stop worrying about his son tells you to keep watch at the workshop..."

Hiccup winced at that, "Really...?"

Gobber glanced up, using his hammer to push his iron mask out of his face and look the boy into the eye, "Well, you were gone for most of the day." He redirected his gaze towards the star-covered sky, "And night... It'll be mornin' in about two hours. I know you usually spend a lot of time on that Night Fury of yours, travelling all around the place, but never this long."

He flapped the mask back down again, now taking the piece of metal and holding it into the smouldering hearth.

Hiccup could make out the large contours of Grump somewhere next to it.

"Well, at least Stoick does not have to worry about grandchildren anymore."

"Wait, WHAT!?" Exasperated, Hiccup stepped inside the work shop, "No, look! We're...a couple, not engaged; please Gobber, don't tell dad about this yet, I'm not ready to hear his endless talks about settling down to have a family right now; I'll tell him soon enough on my own, okay?"

The bulky Viking sighed, shaking his head, "Alright, whatever you wish, but don't blame me if he finds out anyway."

The boy sighed in relief, a hand flying to his forehead comfortingly, "Thanks Gobber." He straightened himself, staying mute as the man in front of him continued to work on the material, "Well...I guess...I'll go home then." He pointed his thumb back into the direction of his house, nudging towards Toothless who now trudged out of the workshop to join him.

"Alright then lad, stay safe."

"Goodnight Gobber."

* * *

><p>"THAT'S my boy!" The strong clap onto his back caused Hiccup's breath to burst out, a prickling sensation overtaking his skin as he believed his lung wanted to jump out of his body right about now.

Of course his father had found out about him and Astrid. How could he have not? Gobber...well...had a big gob. And Stoick was the chief, after all.

"You made a great choice; Astrid is a fantastic young lady and will surely gift me with beautiful grandchil- I mean, gift you with beautiful children, of course." He laughed loudly, his voice rumbling

along the walls and Hiccup winced.

"D-Dad! We're not married, okay! We're just...you know..." He struggled to find the right words, feeling his cheeks on the verge of melting off his face.

Yet Stoick continued to chuckle delightedly, "I know, a proposal is a serious and tricky task to accomplish, my boy. Asking a woman to forever be your sweetheart demands quite a lot of patience, planning, and perfect execution."

There was this lump building within his throat once more; the one he had gotten accustomed to ever since all of the town's attention was directed towards him.

"Eer..._yeah_..." Hiccup rubbed his cheeks, considering splashing his morning beverage into his face in the hopes that that might make him _wake up_.

Yet a swift and curious question now popped into his mind; something he really wanted to know; _had_ always wanted to know, but did not dare ask his father previously.

Now, though, seemed different.

"Dad...?"

The huge, muscular man suddenly turned his attention towards his son, having been deeply in thought himself mere seconds ago.

"How did you propose to mom?" He knew it was a risky question to ask; his father did not like to touch the delicate subject of his deceased mother.

Only once had Stoick told Hiccup, with a silent, desperate and saddened voice, how his mother had gotten dragged away by a dragon when he was barely a few days old.

He had explained to him about the ceremony; the most honourable Viking tradition, wherein the passage into Valhalla is granted by sending a decorated boat with the corpse over the oceans, igniting flames so that the Valkyries might see her and take her to Odin's chamber of glory.

Of course, there had been no corpse. But still, the ceremony had been held, and everyone mourned for a long time.

She had been different, but she had been special nonetheless, and people loved her heart-warming character.

"Your mother and I knew each other for ages." Stoick answered, his expression holding a new form of serenity within it; his eyes glittering brightly with yearning and adoration. Hiccup rarely ever got to indulge in such moments.

"I admired her from afar for a long time before I finally found the courage to talk to her. And when I proposed" A smile adorned his lips, the elder Viking shaking his head mirthfully at the memory, "I sang to her a song I once discovered in an old, tattered book in my house. It had been written by one of our ancestors, and was the song

he had dedicated to his dear wife. I sang and danced, making a fool of myself, but your mother cried with glee."

The way his father looked so intensely at Hiccup made him believe Stoick could see her within the reflection of his eyes. Maybe _that_ was even the case.

"And then we danced together. It was our song, Hiccup, and we never forgot." Sighing lengthily, the chief got onto his feet, a sorrowful smile still present, "Whatever you do to request Astrid's hand in marriage, make it something memorable; something both of you will never forget."

A brief puff of air escaped Hiccup's lips at the memory of that conversation a few years ago. He could not help the smile, receiving a wondrous look from his black companion.

The sound of a silent grunt got him out of his reverie, and he glanced sideways towards Toothless.

Gazing into his golden orbs, finding his reflection within the obsidian pupils, the boy chuckled quietly.

He needed no words and no gestures to have Toothless understand is everyday woes. The reptile could feel the weighty burden he carried with him as if it were his own. He never ceased to remind Hiccup that they were in this together.

_ 'Your pain is my pain.' _

"You're right bud. Well, we can't _walk_ back to Berk. Let's go." He quickly jumped onto his back, and Toothless took off like an arrow.

* * *

><p>Landing swiftly at the pier as they reached Berk, Hiccup jolted off Toothless' saddle before his paws could touch the nailed wood.<p>

"Look at whom me have here." From the fish huts approached no stranger to Hiccup, "It's an honour to have the chief look by, now, isn't it me lads?" He glanced behind him, eyeing his men carefully as those laughed and nodded, greeting Hiccup in return.

"Yeah, thanks for the flattery, Eret" Hiccup gradually walked up to him, "I need to talk to you."

"Of course. Well then." He held out his hands in front of himself, as if declaring that he was a man with an open ear all the time.

"It's about...wait, where's Skullcrusher?" Frowning, Hiccup peeked around, not finding the large Rumblehorn anywhere.

"I sent him off to help at the sawmills. He's a powerful dragon, after all, and they are having some problems there."

Hiccup nodded, returning to his actual topic, "Astrid, Mom and I found an injured Timberjack in the forests on Dragon Island. Seems like there are still traps laid about."

Eret grimaced at that, shamefully redirecting his eyes towards the planks he stood on, "Yeah, we had laid out quite a few; and I was not the only dragon trapper Drago had under his command. I wouldn't be surprised if there still are many traps around."

The chief nodded, "And seeing as that is the case, I'd appreciate it if you and Skullcrusher would take a little tour around and deactivated those traps before further dragons get hurt, maybe even riders."

"Yes, of course chief." He folded his arms in front of his chest.

"If you want, you can take a small team of riders with you. Although I wouldn't bother with the twins, nor Snotlout." Hiccup held out a hand warningly, trying to display with utmost sincerity that he was not joking.

In return, Eret nodded, smirking smugly, "Of course not, wouldn't want to ask those crazy guys anyway. But maybe Astrid could be of some help, and that Ingerson boy. He knows a lot about dragons, after all."

At the mentioning of his girlfriend Hiccup had to twist his lips painfully himself. He felt a small squeeze around his heart region. He did not want to have an argument with her; some sort of rift growing between them.

It was the first time they had anything bordering to a disagreement anyway.

He was not used to this.

Eret seemed to have picked up on the distress, for he grinned knowingly all of a sudden, "Aah, trouble with the ladies, my chief?"

Hiccup glared at the muscular man in front of him, not bothering to answer.

"Don't get me wrong, chief, not that I appreciate your afflictions; I can just tell. They call me a lady's man, after all." He pulled at his woollen vest symbolically, causing Hiccup to roll his eyes.

"Yeah, of course you are. I could tell with Ruffnut." Once more Eret grimaced, evidently not appreciating the reminder.

"Well, if you don't mind my nosy prying; what is the matter with you and the woman-of-your-heart? She has often come by these last weeks asking where you were, 'cause she seemingly could never find you."

"I've been...working...on things." Obviously not knowing what Hiccup meant, Eret simply nodded slowly, frowning at him, "Important things...preparations." Hiccup twirled his hand in the air, avoiding the man's gaze, "And now I need to go. Anyway, please head off with Skullcrusher as soon as you've got your team; oh, and, don't ask Astrid to go with you. I need to...talk to her."

Raising an intrigued eyebrow, the former dragon trapper gave his chief a knowing smirk, having seemingly caught onto what he was plotting, "Oh alright. I will, of course."

Nodding, Hiccup turned, climbing onto Toothless' back.

"Oh and, Hiccup?" Eret called before said person could soar back towards Berk's centre, "Good luck with that!"

* * *

><p>Hiccup had an uneasy feeling accompanying him as he elegantly landed with Toothless near the entrance to the Mead Hall.<p>

His mother knew of his proposal plans, and now Eret seemed to have read it between the lines, too. How long would it take for all the other Berkians to gather what intentions he had, and thus, for Astrid to add one and one together?

She was, after all, one of the cleverest people walking around. Hiccup was sure as hell that she could beat Eret in every competition he could think of, so if said man knew of his plans...

"Hiccup!"

...How long would it take for her to get the terribly obvious hint, no matter how hard the chief tried to conceal it?

"Astrid." The blonde Viking approached him with a smile, having jogged towards him until she decided to slow down her pace.

"I took the Timberjack baby to Gothi. She's seeing to it now; he'll be alright, although not without scars..." Her voice dropped at the last part, which Hiccup understood all too well.

He bobbed his head several times, "Good, he's in best hands then."

A curt silence ensued, creating a rather nervous atmosphere around the couple.

"Alright, I'll go into the Hall then, we have another meeting and I wanted to discuss the plans for this winter..."

His opposite smiled again, mimicking Hiccup's actions, before quickly peeking over her shoulder at her patient Deadly Nadder.

"Mom will be there" he pointed his thumb towards the grand wooden gates, "to help out and bring in some of her own suggestions...maybe...you..wanna come...too...?"

Suddenly, she was searching for his eyes, grasping them with her own and staring at them for several seconds.

"You sure...? I could be helping out with melting the ice, and carrying the wood to the building sites and..." She had twisted her body to glance at the various parts of Berk that cried for attendance, only to falter with her words.

"Astrid." She jerked her head back, feeling a strange, crawling sensation underneath her skin.

"I'd...really appreciate it if you joined me in the hall." He spoke it with such a soft tone that it totally contradicted his rather stern, concentrated expression.

"Yeah."

"Good."

"Good."

The chief now swerved his body to walk towards the countless steps, believing his blonde counterpart to be following, until her voice stopped him.

"Hiccup!"

For some strange, inexplicable reason, he dared not turn around and face her. So he simply stood still, indicating that he was listening.

"I'm sorry...about earlier on. I didn't mean to act all upset and that. I-I'm just as little used to this as you, and..." she was fiddling with her fingers now, not sure what to do with herself, before she flung her hands into the air "I miss spending time with you and Toothless."

The boy could not help a smirk mar his features as he leisurely turned around to face her, "Was it very hard?"

"W-What...?" She frowned by now.

"Saying those words. They totally don't sound like you; you're not really the sentimental type."

Catching up on his mockery, the blonde felt heat creep into her cheeks, "Don't get smug, young man! I can be sentimental, but right now is not a moment for that." She then pressed her lips together, intensifying her glare, "Urgh, why am I even trying!" She threw her arms up into the air, spinning around and storming towards her dragon when unexpectedly, an arm grasped her around the waist and pulled her back, causing her to stumble.

"Woah!" Hiccup now had her smugly fitted within his embrace.

"You're not going anywhere, milady, not until I get a kiss." Before Astrid could protest much (not like she intended to), Hiccup had already claimed her lips in a passionate, yet chaste kiss.

She smiled into it, "Someone's brave..." she mocked, "You seemed upset yourself just a moment ago."

He sighed, gazing at the ground between their feet, "Astrid, I promise I'll tell you, okay? Just, I need time. Because it's not easy. But important."

Still confused as to what exactly was on his mind, but feeling the fidelity in his words, Astrid nodded again, allowing her boyfriend to

kiss her one more time before she tugged at his hands, pulling him back towards the steps.

"They won't wait all day for us." She laughed as they legged up the stone slabs.

* * *

><p>Hiccup gradually felt all the frustration and burning, boiling stress reform within him as he stood in front of a crowd of discontent, complaining Viking's who were all drowning him with their problems.<p>

He tried to answer them, but as soon as he formed coherent words to bring salvation to one Viking and his sheep-farm dilemma, a new Viking chimed in with a completely different, unnerving situation. Like for example the fact that the chickens were striking, no longer laying eggs. Or that their house was burnt down, or they could not find their favourite tea spoon or _whatever. _

Valka stood a few metres to his left, sighing with sympathy as she watched her son fight his futile battle with the crowd.

He'd rather have the Bewilderbeast up against him once more. She knew.

Astrid, who was right next to him, seemed to finally have had enough of all the ruckus and chaos that was currently reigning the hall. She spiralled towards the exit, making her way, and Hiccup felt his heart sink unbearably deep within his body.

He should have known that she could not take it; all this pandemonium. This was supposed to be a helpful, deep-thought meeting where the authority lay clearly with Hiccup, not some come-and-complain gathering.

He could only imagine too well how annoyed his girlfriend must have been right then.

Yet just as all his hopes were about to shatter on the ground, he heard the drumming _Bang! Bang! Bang!_ sound of solid wood thundering against the floor.

Then a curt, high-pitched whistle ensued and a sudden, fiercely fast tirade of deadly sharp Nadder-spikes soared through the room, embedding themselves into the various pillars and walls.

Everyone within the hall shut up immediately, staring bewildered at the many dangerous dragon-scales that could have hit each of them at any given moment.

"People of Berk!" Astrid called out, the large wooden plank still within her grasp as she leaned against it leisurely, "Let your chief speak first! And complain _later_. O__ne_, after the other." She gave them all a pointed glare, to which most people nodded meekly.

Hiccup sighed contentedly, feeling admiration swell up within his chest as he watched the blonde Viking pat her dragon appreciatively before she returned to his side.

"Well then, chief, we're listening." She announced, hands on her hips and a smile on her lips.

He straightened himself in front of the masses, pressing out his chest and acting broad, just like how his father had once explained a while back.

"We need to repair all of the houses before the winter storms arrive" Hiccup finally begun, reminding himself to raise his voice so that everyone could hear him, "We will have to divide up the dragons into teams for those who go melt and carry away the ice, and those that help gather the wood for the numerous houses. Vikings must all work and rebuild; together with the dragons."

He swiftly let his eyes wander across the various, apprehensive faces.

"Gronkles, Monstrous Nightmares and the likes should take on the ice-melting job. Deadly Nadders should assist with the building. Scauldrons and Thunderdrums are necessary for the fishing boats that we need to send out for this winter's food-gathering." He continued to explain the different jobs diverse dragons should undertake, afterwards going into detail how teams should be split up to search for food, wood, and rebuild Berk.

"What about the animals!? The yak's won't give milk and the chicken's don't lay eggs!" one Viking complained with a lamenting voice.

"Yeah! The stables are nearly all destroyed! There won't be enough food!"

Suddenly, Astrid stepped forward, placing her hands pacifyingly in front of herself, "Riders will go to the various farms and help rebuild stables. The dragons will use their fire to create warm niches for the animals, so that they feel comfortable again. That'll allow them to lay eggs and give milk."

The people seemed pleased with the given answer, for no further complaint arose.

Hiccup then continued with a list of all Vikings, ordering them into even and just teams. He had several problems discerning which Viking was whom, and who was better at what. As soon as she realised his trouble at telling them all apart, Astrid pointed to the various names and indicated which ones were suited to go in which team.

Soon, they had everything sorted out. Valka threw in some words of advice and pacification here and there, but the main work had been handed down to Hiccup and Astrid, who had mastered the task pretty efficiently.

When one of them faced a problem with a quarrelling Viking, the other stepped in and resolved the situation.

Very quickly, no Viking stood anymore within the hall; all had dispersed to attend their newly-dealt work. Berk roared with life and progression.

"That was great, Hiccup" Valka announced as she stepped up to her son, who was sorting out masses of scrolls, "you two really had them under control, my presence was dispensable." She spoke with a strong sense of pride, her eyes soft as she stared at her son.

"Thanks mom..." He briefly looked at Astrid, who smiled in return.

"You two make a great team." Clapping him softly onto the back, Valka headed towards the exit, "Cloudjumper and I will help out with the ice-spikes. See you two later."

She was gone before another word could be uttered.

The auburn-haired boy began to inspect Astrid all of a sudden, watching as she cleared out the room and picked up various, scattered items, returning order into the great Mead Hall.

She did not notice his pondering stare, as he contemplated a scenario wherein he would have dealt with all the Vikings by himself, without her help, and how miserably he would have failed.

She aided him so fluidly, and quickly, and knew exactly what to say, do, or advice. And when she did not, then he did. Together, they had sorted everyone out in a matter of minutes. It felt as if a huge, clogging burden had been taken from his shoulders and off his chest, allowing for his muscles to relax and his lungs to gulp in the full amount of air.

Astrid had become so vital in his life, imagining it without her seemed like a nightmare he did not even want to remember.

'Her and Toothless...' he thought fondly. A life without his midnight coloured companion was just as unthinkable as a life without her.

They all belonged there, allowing for Hiccup to grow and others around him to rise equally.

Once more, he could only marvel at how much life had changed these past five to six years.

"That's the last of it." Astrid chimed in, placing the final plank at the back of the hall, where it lay neatly.

She swiped her hands clean, clapping them together, "Great! That went well!" She cheered, now averting her gaze towards Hiccup.

Said boy had forgotten his rather intense, yet soft, stare, as he thought about just how grateful he was.

"You okay?" She called him out of his reverie, and he grinned his trademark grin.

"Yeah, all perfect." Stepping down a ledge and sluggishly making his way towards her, Hiccup felt the desperate need to tell her what was currently thrashing his mind.

His admiration for her strong, independent character; her amazing

tactics and beautiful smiles gave him all the encouragement he needed that day.

All he had to do was ask; surely she would find this moment memorable, nonetheless, right?

He could make it all perfect; it would be perfect, once they were officially a team and he had her all by his side again.

He never wanted to let her go.

"Astrid-

"Chief!" The gates burst open violently, a breathless, panting Eret standing there, clutching the wood to his side.

The young Viking glared at him, obviously unamused about the fact that he had gotten interrupted once more in what was supposed to be an intimate and glorious moment.

Although, Hiccup knew, it would have not been as special as he desired it to be.

So maybe he should thank Eret someday, for allowing him to reconsider his tactical proposal.

"Eret, what is it?" Hiccup now questioned, slightly concerned at the rather disturbed expression the former dragon-trapper carried.

It took him a while to catch some air, calming his obviously vibrating nerves as he righted himself, swallowing thickly, "I have bad news."

* * *

><p>AN: I like to end chapters with cliffies; it's mean, and rightfully so :P_

_So if you liked this chapter, and want __**chapter 3**__, then please __**review**__ and tell me so. All it needs is a word; __**"next"__ will do to show me you like this and are not a silent background reader :D_

Thanks~

3. Chapter 3

****Chapter 3****

Toothless flapped his wings at a murderous velocity, swooshing through the sky like an arrow shot from Thor's bow.

They passed by a high rock-construction where various seagulls squawked and complained. The wind rushed past with a loud gushing sound as the water sparkled ferociously underneath them.

Hiccup had his helmet on, shielding his vulnerable eyes from the on-slaughter of wind and speed.

A little off to the left, a few feet behind, Astrid and Stormfly tried to keep up with the team's menacing pace, the female Nadder gliding strenuously across the heavens.

Even further behind her, Skullcrusher struggled to keep up. Despite being quite a speedy dragon when he needed to be, the man on his back appeared to not have overall dominance concerning the beautifully coloured beast, causing the dragon to become a little irritated.

Nerve-wrecking as it was, Hiccup patted Toothless, calling for him to regulate his tempo a bit so that the others could catch up. He was being ignorant, zooming off without much thought and leaving his companions behind.

There might not be any imminent danger right now, but with what Eret had told them merely half an hour prior to their departure, anything was possible.

Anything might come at them, at any given moment.

"Eret, hurry up!" Astrid called over the gusts, clearly discontented herself at the lack of control the boy currently possessed over his dragon, "You are riding a Rumblehorn, not a spike-covered Whispering Death."

"Oh sorry that I cannot serve with five years of riding-expertise, your highness. I still am getting used to this." Eret defended, not pleased about the criticism.

Skullcrusher rattled and swayed some more, before he finally balanced his wings out and ultimately gained a little speed.

"We need to head left from 'ere." Eret shouted, trying to reach the chief's side.

Hiccup nodded, albeit Eret not seeing said action. They all swerved into the indicated direction, soon finding cliffs, grassy lands and foresty planes to replace the sparkling, blue-green hue of the ocean.

And it was not much longer after that when Eret suddenly began to descend, Astrid and Hiccup following suit.

Stormfly jumped onto the ground, folding her wings back elegantly as Toothless flapped to soften the landing, before he settled down fully.

Skullcrusher displayed a little less prize-worthy landing, as he smacked to the ground on all four, the earth rumbling a bit under his weight, Eret nearly tilting off his saddle.

The chief could not help a small chuckle to escape his lips upon the sight as he removed his head gear.

"Well then" Eret muttered, pain shooting up his spine as he clambered off Skullcrusher's back, "here we are." With his hand, he pointed to the forest ahead of them.

"Where did you find it?" The blonde Viking intervened, a serious

expression replacing her former, amused features.

Eret sighed, turning his back to the couple as he gestured for them to follow his lead.

They trudged through the mossy cluster of trees for another five minutes, Before Eret abruptly halted in front of a slightly larger, somewhat odd tree.

"This is where I found the first one." He explained, crouching down as he fumbled within the grass, presenting Hiccup and Astrid with a sight they rather would not have seen.

"There are more, of course, but this one is the only _deactivated_ one I found."

The auburn-haired Viking inspected the trap Eret was showing them, watching the construction wrap itself concealingly around the tree, painted in greens and browns so that it was not viewable from a distance.

The sharp, metal fangs were shut tight, within it a splatter of dried, crusted blood that had turned a disturbing maroon shade.

"And you are sure these are none of the traps you had laid out before the war?" Hiccup wanted Eret to confirm his words from earlier.

"Yes, a hundred percent sure, chief. I know exactly what traps I had laid out where, it was my speciality. And whilst I did find some of mine around, and of former colleagues; _this_ one is new. There are many indications showing me that it has been set out not long ago." He stroked his fingers along the cold, dull metal, eyebrows furrowed.

"The tree is odd." Astrid suddenly exclaimed, tilting her head as she stared wondrously at the plant.

Hiccup now took the chance to follow her gaze and inspect it more clearly; he had found it somewhat different earlier on, anyway.

Yet it was at this precise moment he discovered just what had unnerved him earlier.

The tree was covered in deeply etched, stained scratches and cuts. Half of the bark had been peeled off, partially hanging in shreds from the tree's main branch. Some lay scattered on the ground. The dark splodges of colour were indeed blood, too.

"What the hell happened here..." Astrid muttered, and Hiccup recognized the shocked tone she now owned.

"Someone's trapping dragons again, and he or she is not being the nicest with them at all." Eret stood up from his position, reluctantly touching the bark, "The other traps are being deactivated by my men as we speak. I do not know, of course, if there are any more on other islands."

"Who would do this...?" Her blue eyes suddenly growing wide in horror, she turned around to face her boyfriend, "Hiccup, you don't

think that-"

"Yes, I do." His voice was devoid of any sympathetic emotion as he pressed his lips together firmly, before speaking through gritted teeth, "There is only one man who would do this."

Eret gulped, catching Hiccup's intense gaze.

As if reading his mind, he spoke the word that confirmed all of their theories and fears, and ultimately started what would be another hot-blooded, frustrating fight.

"Drago."

* * *

><p>"Hiccup, no!" She tried to push herself in front of his body, blocking his pathway so that he would have to devote her with his full attention.<p>

Yet being good half a head taller than the young Hofferson, Hiccup had no trouble in avoiding her intense, paralysing eyes all together.

He side-stepped, going towards his desk where he snatched up a few items he considered useful on his coming trip.

"Hiccup, please, listen to me." She was frustrated by now.

After their terrifying discovery in those forests, the chief had stormed off, jumping onto Toothless' back and returning to Berk so rapidly Astrid had trouble keeping up.

She knew what he was plotting.

She knew it would be insane, and not end well.

And she feared for his safety;_ for him_.

"Let's talk about this first." She pleaded, once more intending to block his way, yet Hiccup pushed by leisurely, grabbing some provisions after he descended the stairs.

Astrid followed suit, anger welling up within her due to the fact that her boyfriend was simply ignoring her.

"Hiccu-"

"There is nothing we need to talk about." He near to shouted, his teeth grinding menacingly, "Dragons are being hunted. Drago is out there, starting all over. We need to stop him."

"I know, and we will. But right now, we need to protect Berk; they need us right now. They need you."

"That's exactly what I'm doing" having his bag all packed, he closed it tight, heading towards the door, "I'm protecting my people, and I'm protecting our dragons." His hand flung to the door, ready to open it, but Astrid interjected once more.

"Hiccup!" Her tone was so fierce and intense that he could not help but freeze in his movements, eyes widening a little.

"Berk needs you. Here. Your people are suffering from the after-effects of the last war. They are not ready for another one just yet." Gradually, she moved towards him, his back still facing her, "You know I always support you, no matter what decisions you make. But right now, I believe it's the wrong step. Rebuild Berk, prepare our people, whilst we send out a scouting team to do further investigations. Find out what he's up to; if we act impulsively now, we'll only make losses."

The last sentence came out a little quieter, for Astrid was delicately reminding Hiccup of the most tragic loss the war had demanded off of him, and of Berk.

"I'll go on my own." He now responded silently.

"That's the loss I'm talking about, Hiccup." Her voice was on the verge of breaking, and as he turned around, albeit hesitantly, to look at her, he saw the sorrowful sparkle in her eyes.

She was reminded of all the terrible anguish the battle had bought with it, and obviously wanted no repetition.

"When we fought the Red Death" and Astrid tried to keep as much strength present within her voice as her angst granted her to have, "you nearly did not make it. Against Drago, it was almost the same. Once, when Toothless was being controlled, and twice, when the Bewilderbeast had you encased in ice."

His gaze softened, noticing how she moved closer towards him, a serious expression marred to her features, "Hiccup that's three times too many. I just fear..." She dared not end the sentence, for the thought alone tore at her chest like a piercing knife made out of Timberjack wing, slicing through without mercy, "If you go out there now, on your own, unprepared, without much thought."

She shook her head, leaving Hiccup to figure out the rest of her words, which was not hard.

"Berk has only just lost one of the greatest men it ever had; please, don't make it two."

Astrid took another step towards him, and then another, soon finding herself only a foot away from the chief.

They both kept each other's penetrating gazes for a few minutes, trying to read the other's emotions rather than hearing them being spoken.

Indeed, Hiccup could tell the fear lingering within her, whilst she determined his will and inner chagrin.

"Toothless is the Alpha" The boy finally interrupted the silence with an utter that would have nearly been missed by her, "nothing will happen to us or the dragons as long as he has control."

"Toothless won because he had all the dragon's on his side. You both, alone, won't make it. We need Berk. We need to unite. But for that,

we need to recover first." It really was not her usual stance to oppose her boyfriend's and best friend's decision, but she knew this time, it was the right thing to do.

There was a pressuring urge in her voice that Hiccup could not miss the beat of. She was close to demanding him to stay, and if she pinned him down with Stormfly's spikes, then so be it.

Feeling his resolve gradually crumble in front of her stricken form, Hiccup let his shoulders slack, the bag in his hands falling out of his grasp as he sighed.

Understanding the meaning of his gesture, Astrid rushed forward, lacing her arms around his neck and pulling him into a tight embrace.

"Thank you." She mumbled into his chest, pressing herself more strongly against him.

Hiccup smiled weakly, placing his arms around her waist and holding her for a good lengthy amount of time.

As they finally separated, Hiccup still having his arms loosely interlocked around her, she spoke up again, "We'll inform Valka, and together form a concise team. Meanwhile, we repair Berk, get through the winter and then we can use whatever information we discover to take the right measures up against Drago and his Bewilderbeast."

Hiccup nodded, agreeing with her plan, "Maybe we need to tame the Bewilderbeast; free him from Drago's reign. So that he stands on our side."

"Yeah, that's a good plan." Once more, she smiled, the glowing azure in her eyes piercing through his, "Don't worry, we'll protect our people, and our dragons." She reassured, softly pecking him on the lips.

Right at that moment, he had never been more glad to have her by his side.

* * *

><p>Her former tranquil, peaceful mood suddenly morphed into one of horror and deep, bitter resentment, mixed with the finest, growing slithers of dread.<p>

"Are you sure?" She now asked after having listened to Hiccup's and Astrid's precise descriptions.

"We have not found the injured dragon yet; we sent Fishlegs and a few younger Vikings off to search for it." Astrid chimed in, following Valka as she walked around Cloudjumper, attaching a few saddlebags around his midsection.

"Drago is gathering a new army..." Valka breathed out silently, fearful eyes gazing at the ground.

"Mom, don't worry, we'll stop him." Her attention now swerved towards her only son.

He stood, tall and proud, and so full of determination in front of her, those beautiful, malachite eyes shimmered with strength and will, she was reminded of Stoick for the briefest of moments, "We'll follow the trappers and find out what he's plotting, and we'll beat him at his own game. We've done it before, we'll do it again." At this point, Toothless pressed his muzzle against Hiccup, who stroked it sympathetically.

The dragon wailed deeply, showing his approval of the plan.

"With Toothless now as the Alpha, he won't have an easy game. He would have to control Toothless; but he's on Hiccup's side." The blonde Viking smirked knowingly, folding her arms.

Valka nodded, sighing once deeply, "Then I shall join the team to track down the trappers. I have thwarted their plans before; I know how to do it."

Both Astrid and Hiccup had nothing to protest.

"Eret will go with you; seeing as this is his repertoire. Otherwise, I leave it up to you to sort out a suitable team." Hiccup now declared, stepping around the Stormcutter to stand right in front of his mother, "As few and capable riders as possible. So they won't find you." She could tell the slight hint of worry in his voice.

He had only just lost a father; he need not lose a mother too.

Upon that realisation, Valka gently touched his cheek, smiling with pride, "Don't worry, Hiccup, we'll find those trappers and nothing will happen to us." She nodded to reinforce her idea.

Somehow, it indeed did calm the chief's nerves, Astrid equally relaxing next to him.

"Maybe I should go along." his girlfriend suggested, pondering as she spoke.

He would be lying if he said he had not expected it. Nonetheless, he was surprised, and felt an unwanted wave of apprehension.

Before Hiccup could protest, throwing in any to him logical reason for her not to go, for he did not want her out there without him, his mother chimed in.

"That is a great idea; Astrid is a formidable rider, and it'll help a lot in gathering information."

Pleased at the elder Viking's reaction, Astrid grinned proudly, now glancing at her boyfriend, "What do you say, chief?"

He felt it rather idiotic to protest now. Even though Toothless right next to him rumbled deeply, evidently feeling his concern, Hiccup mustered a smile of his own, "Yeah, that's a great idea! Astrid will surely help find those trappers in no time."

He hoped his fake confidence was not as palpable as he felt it was.

"Good, we'll head out tomorrow morning as soon as the sun rises. In the meantime, we prepare an adequate team and make a plan on how we shall fly." The blonde seemed all the more resolute on heading off.

"We'll have a meeting about that this afternoon then; once you have gathered a team." Hiccup explained a little dejectedly, avoiding any eye-contact with either female, "I have to go now and meet up with Gobber to see about our armoury and further saddles for the Vikings."

"Alright son, then let's meet at dawn at the Great Hall." Valka touched his shoulder softly, before she turned towards Cloudjumper and was gone with the wind.

Only a few seconds ticked by until Astrid spoke up, "You alright?" he could feel her hand grasping his tenderly.

"Yeah, of course!" He only peeked at her eyes for a second before he swerved away, "I've got a handful of Vikings to sort out and prepare for an upcoming, possible war..." _And my girlfriend has decided to go scouting around without me. I feel sick to the marrow already._

"Hiccup, I know you don't want to be left behind; I mean, you and Toothless would make the perfect team to find those trappers. But you are irreplaceable _here_." Astrid cupped his cheek into her hand, trying to find his eyes as he kept staring off into the distance.

The black dragon nudged Astrid's side now, who patted him lovingly, "As soon as we're back, we have another meeting and discuss our findings."

Hiccup now took the chance to actually look at her. He did not want to tell her that it unnerved him that she was out there without him; after all, they had been split before, just like when he was at the dragon sanctuary and Astrid actually went to Drago's lair, believing him to be there.

She was headstrong, and more than capable on coping on her own. It was absolutely moronic to worry when she had fought out there without him often enough; and considering that both _Valka_ and _Eret_ were to go with her "he should be ashamed of himself for doubting her skill.

But it was less doubt than simple yearning; yearning to go and throw himself at the world, find everything there was to find on Toothless' back as they soared and skilfully jumped through the skies.

He had, after all, not used his para-gliders in _ages_.

It was equally the yearning to do so with Astrid next to him; his perfect companion, as he liked to think so sometimes, along with Stormfly.

There was, of course, also the fear of being on his own on Berk and having the possibility arise that he might just not cope; as had been the case inside the Great Mead Hall merely a few hours back.

If Astrid had not helped him out...

"I'll go and start gathering a suitable team; you should head to Gobber." The girl now interrupted his mute pondering, quickly pecking his cheek, "Meet you later." She whispered before she left.

Hiccup cursed himself for his silence.

* * *

><p>"Look at whom we have here: the pride of Berk, as yer father would say."<p>

"Very flattering, Gobber." Hiccup trudged inside the workshop, grabbing an apron which he lazily tied around himself, ignoring the fact that it half-hung off his shoulder and was inside out.

Toothless stumbled in next to him, seating himself and curiously watching his friend begin to work by placing some iron rods into the burning embers.

"Go on, lad, tell good old Gobber what's up with you." He fumbled with his stone tooth for a moment, seemingly contemplating something before he continued to measure around a leather dragon saddle.

"Drago is out there, rebuilding his army and trapping dragons! And I'm...I'm-" Pressing his lips aggravatingly together, teeth grinding against each other inside, Hiccup growled like a winged reptile himself.

There was a good handful of silence before Gobber decided to speak up again, "I see, and the chief wants nothing more than to find him and confront him and of course, _stop_ him from executing his terrible plan."

He did not have to turn around and watch Hiccup dejectedly nod his head.

"And what else is on yer mind?"

The boy now frowned, "What do you mean?"

"Oh come on, Hiccup" He trudged towards the hearth, grasping the rod the chief held in his hands and dipping it into the barrel of water, "you are thinking about something; _someone_, if I'm correct." He scratched his chin with his hammer-hand as he worded his theory.

A grunting noise from his right confirmed that theory, as Toothless huffed in agreement.

"Even your dragon knows!" Gobber turned, fixating the rod around the makeshift saddle, trying to find the right position.

"Yeah, alright, so I wanna go out there and I'm worried about someone-"

"Astrid."

Hiccup eyed the elder man suspiciously, wondering how come he knew perfectly what was on his mind right at that moment.

"Right..."

"I heard you wanted to propose?" Gobber did not face him now, either, after he spoke those words rather nonchalantly.

But Hiccup stumbled, blinking several times as he felt his eyebrows sweat terribly.

Gobber knew?

He knew already?

Oh by Odin's beard, how long would it take for everyone else to find out?!

"Don't worry, Astrid does not know. I just have my...sources."

Well, he was called Gobber for a reason.

"I take it things are not going as planned then, ey?"

"What makes you think that?" Hiccup seated himself on top of a sealed keg, the apron sliding off as Toothless came and inspected him carefully.

Said dragon glanced up at the sky, observing the wandering clouds and streaks of fading blue heaven.

He warbled lightly, indicating to Hiccup that he wanted to take a flight with him around Berk.

But the boy just ignored his request, still deep in thought.

"Because you would be all elated if it were otherwise." He bulky man continued with hammering onto another rod from the hearth, reforming it.

"I just don't have time to think about such thoughts right now..." the chief mumbled, slumping in his seat.

"Really? Everyone is expecting you to think about that, though. Everyone wants to hear wedding bells chime, my boy."

"Wedding bells chime?" What bizarre custom was that?

"Read it in a book once; something about a strange tradition from some more western countries. Not like many Viking's usually travel there." He shrugged, plunging his piece of metal into the freezing water and watching it sizzle, smoke crowding the workshop, "Anyway. The Berkians are desiring a heir."

Hiccup thought he was going to choke on his own spit, finally deciding to stand up, boxing his chest to free his lungs, "What!?"

"When yer father became Chief, he was married to Valka already. And

soon afterwards, she was announced pregnant. That's the kind of news this village needs to get their hopes up."

"O-Okay, _wait_." The boy placed his hands in front of himself, taking in a deep breath, "I have not even _proposed_ yet, alright? And...w-why is everyone demanding a _heir; _I just turned Chief!" His exasperated, large orbs skirted across the room, finally landing on a soundly asleep Grump.

Gobber laughed roughly, "Oh Hiccup, that's the way of life! Not that everyone is expecting you to die tomorrow, but a chief is not chief forever, and you are twenty. In about twenty further years, the village wants to see a suitable, adequate successor in best shape."

"Are we seriously having this conversation right now?"

"To show us that Berk's future is secured, and safe. And especially stable."

"I think we should stop this conversation right _here_."

"That's why you and Astri- Hiccup?" He peered around in puzzlement, realising the young auburn-haired boy had left.

"Typical, just like when his father requested him to become chief."

* * *

><p>AN: Hehe, I liked ending this chapter on a funny note._

_**Review**__**.**_ Please. I'll give a **baby** __**Night
__Fury**__ to everyone that does. Like. Ferserious.
__**REVIEW**__**.**_ One word will do. __Thanks._

4. Chapter 4

_**A/N: **First off, I wanna say a huge, big, hug-filled **THANK YOU** to every single one of you that has **faved** this story, **alerted** it and also **reviewed****.** You guys are fantastic and amazing, honestly. I read every single one of your reviews and always feel so happy about them. _

_I don't know if you guys know just how much that means to be, 'cause really, I don't feel like posting if I don't get any reaction from my readers. Especially reviews get me going! _

So please, keep up and don't forget to leave behind your thoughts.

Here's the next chapter. A lot of Hiccstrid, I guess...

(BTW thanks to the reviewer "unicorns" who pointed out my spelling mistake in one of my previous chapters! I alternate between German and English writing at the moment, and the former has all its nouns written with capitals; sometimes that leaks into my English. So, thanks for the heads up!)

* * *

<p>Chapter 4

"That sounds so boring."

"Can't we just go in there and crush them with our dragons?"

Hiccup sighed miserably, feeling his eye twitch uncontrollably as he listened to Ruffnut and Tuffnut respectively complain about their _mission_.

"Remind me, please, _why_ you chose the twins to accompany you?" The chief questioned his girlfriend, who stood idly next to him.

"Despite being two mutton-headed morons, they are quite useful when it comes to spying and investigation. Contrary to logical belief, it's always _them_ that find the deciding details." Astrid shrugged sympathetically, leaning down next to Hiccup onto the table, where currently a large map lay.

Hiccup had laid out the very map he, Toothless, Astrid and Stormfly had created over the past five years. It was an incomplete masterpiece, and every tiny detail reminded Hiccup of another great and warm memory of their time together; he missed the _'good old days'_.

"Alright team." his eyes quickly wandered towards the twins again, who were currently punching each other, then to his mother and Eret, and two other Vikings he still needed to remember the names of.

Astrid would have to teach him sometime.

"This is the route we figured would be best to take." With his finger, he trailed along a pathway across the parchment, "Over Dragon Island and onto Fireworm Island, Seashell Cave, Thor's Beard as well as Loki's Lair." He called upon a few of the islands he and Astrid had discovered and named.

"I believe that here, here, and here might be further traps set out. Stay watchful, and low. Don't start a fight; we just want to gather information." His glance fell once more upon the unamused faces of Ruffnut and Tuffnut, who seemed rather oblivious about his worry.

Astrid and Valka closely inspected the depiction, the latter already drawing a mental version for her inner eye, memorizing everything she needed to know.

"It'll be a six hour trip, at least" She then finally announced, once more following Hiccup's trail with her own finger, "as long as we run into no complications."

"Complications? Did someone say complications?"

"Of course they did, idiot!" Ruffnut kicked her brother fiercely into the shin.

"_Ow_, that hurt! Which is good. But complications are better!" Tuffnut grinned malevolently.

"Guys, be serious. This is quite a dangerous scouting mission, and quite important too. You can't mess this up." Hiccup mustered his best, authoritative and intimidating glare, only to earn a disinterested yawn.

"Yeah, of course chief, we'll work our best!" The female twin assured, before she trudged lazily towards the entrance of the Mead Hall, Tuffnut shrugging and following her.

"Of all people to choose from" Eret now interjected, "you chose the _twins_? Wouldn't the Ingerson boy have been a better option?" He frowned with concern and disgust, "Damn it, I'd even take that spit-mouth of a Jorgenson..."

The chief felt a minuscule vibe of sympathy for him, as he remembered how flustered Ruffnut had been with him merely a month ago.

"They'll do a good job, don't worry." Astrid reassured, rolling her eyes.

"We set out tomorrow morning then, meet at the Mead Hall as soon as the sun rises." Valka announced, her arms crossed in front of her chest as she still observed the map on the table.

"Good...As soon as you come back, you find me and we discuss whatever you'll have found out." Hiccup's eyebrows furrowed; he hoped that whatever they discovered, it would help them end this endless chaos.

Both females nodded, Eret shrugging behind them as they headed towards the exit.

"Astrid." Hiccup felt his lips mutter her name before he could contemplate it properly first.

Valka had already left with Eret, leaving only the blonde Viking and her boyfriend behind.

Stormfly and Toothless were somewhere outside, probably waiting as the sun gradually set.

"Yes?" She ambled back towards him.

"I wanted to tell you...that I declare you leader of this team. I mean, I know mom would be very suiting too, but..." he frowned at the ground, trying to stop any possible stutter, "I think you'll do a great job at it." He raised his head, staring directly into those cobalt eyes.

Astrid nodded in understanding, "Thanks. I won't disappoint you." weakly, her lips raised to form a smile.

"Just be careful out there."

"As careful as I can be, considering that I'm a Viking." Folding her arms smugly in front of her chest, she stepped right up towards

him.

"I mean it, Astrid."

"I know" she whispered, placing her lips to kiss the edge of his own, "and you don't forget that you have everything it takes to be a chief in here." She placed her palm on top of his chest, still gazing at him.

Hiccup was about to lean down, wanting to steal her lips into a proper kiss when he felt her tweak his control button and his back-fin suddenly burst forth.

"Astrid..." he growled, the girl simply laughing whole-heartedly at his face, "Isn't it getting old by now?"

"Nope; never."

* * *

><p>Hiccup did not know what was currently unnerving him more; his constant agitation, causing him to thump his foot (his *good* one) uncontrollably onto the stone ground, his annoyance with the current situation that seemed too stupid to cope with, or a mixture out of both.

Probably the last option.

"They burnt down the last of our wood! We need a whole day to get new resources!" A burly, middle-aged Viking yammered, directing his hand towards a Hideous Zippleback and two Hobblegrunts.

Both of the latter beings were gradually turning from red to purple, lowering their heads as if in shame of their deed.

The Zippleback, however, seemed nonchalant.

'Typical...'

"What exactly happened?" He queried, eyeing the dragons as he spoke.

"They started fighting, chief, and things escalated when they spit fire everywhere. They would not listen to us."

As if on cue, the right head of the Zippleback snatched out, ramming its horn against one Hobblegrunt, who turned, snarling before his scales reclaimed their maroon colouring.

"Toothless!" The Night Fury roared, jumping in front of the quarrelling reptiles, glaring them down.

All three stopped their dispute, backing away as Toothless growled some more.

If they were to speak their language, Hiccup was sure Toothless was chastising them, telling them to get back to work, or else...

He laughed weakly at the thought.

He loved spending a lot of time just observing his reptilian companion, trying to understand his thoughts and feelings and get an insight on what he'd say during certain situations. He felt a strengthening of their bond whenever he attempted just that.

All three dragons turned around, flapping their wings as they made their way towards the sawmills to gather further wood.

The chief sighed, "It'll throw us back by a handful of hours; gather a few Gronkles and Timberjacks and continue with the rebuilding of the houses." The Viking nodded several times before he turned and jogged off.

Toothless sat longingly at the town's centre, gazing up at the sky again.

"I know bud, I want to too. But we have work here to do."

The Night Fury turned its head to stare at his rider, amber orbs ogling with longing. He heard a deep, guttural wail leave Toothless' maw.

Hiccup shook his head, walking over. He placed a hand on the side of his face, touching his forehead with that of the dragon.

"It's not quite the way you want it to be, right?" The black reptile rubbed its head affectionately against Hiccup's, grunting with pleasure.

"Then how about we two take a tour around Berk, see how things are going?"

Upon those words, Toothless jumped up and down, his jaw twitching to form a grin, tail wagging with joy.

The young Viking could not help a light chuckle, "I thought you'd like that, then let's go!" Climbing onto his back with ease, Hiccup felt the thrilling rush of wind against his skin as Toothless jolted into the air and darted off like an arrow.

Suddenly, his stomach felt light and ticklish, and all became tiny underneath "the houses shrunk to the size of ants, clouds accumulated around him, the air took on a cooler, more refreshing feel as it seeped lovingly into his lungs.

The blue hue of the heavens became all the more evident, and everything felt a lot more colourful and bright.

Hiccup took in the sight of busy, hard-working Vikings moving forth, cutting and hammering, building and maintaining.

Gobber stood in his workshop, the faint sound of clanking metal reaching Hiccup's ears.

Toothless spread his wings, his rider pressing down on the mechanism to roll out his tail-fin as they soared elegantly over Berk.

It was an incredible feeling; seeing the whole of his heritage with one single glance. And from this height, it looked all the more vulnerable, whilst also powerful and resilient.

He could not explain this contradicting thought; nonetheless, pride filled him strongly as Toothless took a dip, nearing the sawmills.

The auburn-haired boy felt energized, full of adrenaline as he observed dragons help carrying wood to their destinations; then glanced over to several Monstrous Nightmares burning down the last ice spires carefully, other Vikings heaving them down with precise mechanisms Hiccup himself had invented.

"Let's oversee the fishing huts." Hiccup patted Toothless, who somersaulted within the air, the twist of worlds only causing the rider to shout gleefully.

Faster than any eye could follow, they rushed towards the oceans. Hiccup felt mesmerization reclaim his heart as the minuscule, sluggish boats became larger and clearer in size and detail, miniature Vikings fishing incessantly as Scauldrons and Shockjaws plunged into the oceans, helping them out.

He was awed at the tremendous amount of seafood they had already gathered.

"Winter stock should not be any problem now, seeing their speed." Hiccup commented, earning a pleased grunt from his onyx companion.

He was just about to swerve Toothless towards the ice-spikes, feeling his stomach lurch with anticipation, wanting to feel the thrum of blasting wind and incredible velocity again when something off in the distance caught his eye.

A darker, teal being storming through the heaven, followed by something lithe and green, and then some other figures.

"Astrid..." Hiccup mumbled, and he need not tell Toothless, who already dipped forwards, rocketing through the sky as he flew with perfect balance towards the Great Hall.

He felt his heart thrum with dreaded anticipation, but somewhat also a hint of relief as they closed in onto the Mead Hall, the silhouettes of his scouting team becoming all the more apparent.

The chief watched as they gathered near the entrance, staring up towards him, hands cupped above their eyes to shield them from the sun.

Toothless carefully flapped towards the ground, landing soundly as Hiccup hopped off his back, hoping his thundering heart was not as loud as he imagined it to be.

"Hiccup." Valka was the first to break through the quietude, approaching her son with a stern expression.

"What did you find?" He questioned straight away, frowning already.

"Let's go inside, first." Astrid interrupted, gesturing towards the large wooden doors.

Without wasting much time, they all entered the hall, taking a seat at the central, larger table.

It was then, as Hiccup inspected every member of his team carefully to see if he could read from their expressions what they had discovered, that he realised the twins were missing. But he had _seen_ Barf and Belch earlier...

"Where are Ruffnut and Tuffnut?" Did something happen? Were they attacked? Were the twins _captured_!?

"Don't worry; we sent the twins off to do some wood lumbering. They were getting annoying." Astrid declared.

Hiccup could see Eret's stressed face, and how he sighed with relief.

She then continued, "We found nothing. No traps, no injured dragons, nothing. All the dragons were on their usual islands; we even expanded the search, looking on the Changewing Isle and the Land Of Boulders. Nothing; not even a hint that someone had been there." She shrugged her shoulders, as if sorry for her apparent failure.

"I wandered through the forests for a good two hours total" Eret now explained, "nothing chief, and the dragons were all calm. Usually, they can sense the unease and become agitated. These were all merrily minding their own business." He lay back in his seat, stretching his feet.

Hiccup searched for his mother's eyes, finding the deep, colourful orbs giving him every answer he so sought; _they are safe.

—

"Alright..." Hiccup pressed his lips together once more that day, "To be safe, we shall continue the search tomorrow. We'll plan a new route today. To make sure; Eret, you were certain that those traps were new?"

The former trapper nodded vehemently, leaning forward, "Aye, they were! I'm not sure what Drago or any of his men are plotting, but I don't like it."

"Which is why we cannot give up now." Hiccup fumbled for his map, pulling it out and displaying it on the table.

"We shall expand the route; the same team will go onto the search—"

"_Please_, chief, I don't mind working with Valka, despite all our history, nor Hofferson here, but I'd prefer a more serious team than those lunatic twins." Eret interrupted, a look of desperation on his face.

"That bad?" He quirked an eyebrow.

"They were not following orders, messing about all the time. They said as long as it's not the chief's word, it does not have to be taken seriously." Valka shook her head miserably, wandering what terrible upbringing they must have had.

"They don't quite trust Valka nor me, as it seems, and that Astrid is your girl did not really faze them, either. 'Cause she ain't..." Eret stopped at that, tilting his head around like a Nadder curiously observing some chickens.

"She ain't what?" Hiccup asked in a low tone, his eyes furrowing.

A quick peek to the side and he discovered that Astrid had her face turned, her beautiful, blonde locks blocking his view.

"Well, she ain't your wife, chief. That would give her a different position, I presume."

Valka nodded at that, knowing all too well what authority it handed to you.

Hiccup felt his cheeks flush uncontrollably; as his eyes trailed back towards his girlfriend, he saw that she, too, was blushing, hence the reason she had turned her head away.

"Right, well..." He fought back any embarrassed stutter that tried to surface, revealing his sudden queasiness, "we'll just leave the twins here, and you can take Snotlout or Fishlegs with you instead. Let's plan tomorrows route, first."

And he quickly buried the topic underneath his boot, trying to avert his attention by figuring out the next best islands to inspect.

* * *

><p>"How did being chief fair during her absence?" Valka placed a warming arm around his shoulders as they, as the last two, exited the hall, the others already nearing the bottom of the stairs.<p>

"Ah, you know, it went well; trouble here and there but otherwise, it all worked out quite- wait, what!?" The scarlet streak was gradually returning to the bridge of his nose.

Valka chuckled harmoniously, "Oh Hiccup, I know you are having a hard time. But trust me, everything will work out."

They made their careful way down the stairs, the sky dipping from cerulean hues to ones of fiery orange, blazing into an intense maroon with golden streaks and rosy clouds popping up here and there.

"Yeah..." He sighed, looking down his nose at his blonde counterpart, who now reached Stormfly's side and began stroking her lovingly, feeding her some chicken she knew the dragon adored.

"You could try that wonderful song yer father sang to me when he proposed! I am sure she would be all swooning!" Valka bent her arm and punched the air in front of her, new determination blazing up. She wanted to help her son out as much as possible.

There was no way she would ever be able to make up for those twenty years she had missed; twenty vital years that decided so much, and that, ultimately, would have been a lot more bearable with a loving mother at his side.

But instead of mourning over her past decisions, she tried to make the best out of it now.

There was no point giving into _regrets_. _Hiccup_ was glad to have her here; glad he had finally _found_ her. And as long as she stayed, and tried to be a part of his world, she knew he would forgive her.

"E-Erm...yeah, that song really was..._something_." He grinned sheepishly, "And it was great to see you and dad all nostalgic back then, but...I'm pretty sure if I sing that to her she'll...punch my guts out." He muttered the last part, trying to avoid any imagined scenario wherein he actually _sang_ to Astrid_.

It sounded more absurd than it probably was.

Valka patted his back, "I'm sure you'll find something just as persuading. I mean, she's head over heels for ya!" Gesturing with her hand towards the young Viking, who now emptied Stormfly's saddlebags, Valka smiled at her son.

Hiccup's facial expression morphed to one of content and peacefulness, "Yeah..." He murmured, gazing ahead.

"Sometime, you'll find something that will turn out to be the perfect, most romantic situation. And you both will never forget; if it's something memorable, it'll make your love last for all eternity." Valka's happy expression only deepened, and Hiccup turned his attention towards her now, reflecting her mood.

"Finding something that perfect will probably be impossible." He muttered sadly, but his mother shook her head.

"No, no! It's not. It'll come to you, Hiccup, just _wait_ for it. And don't give heed to what all of Berk demands from ya; this is _your_ decision. Not theirs." She grabbed his shoulders now, standing in front of him as they reached the end of the first half of the stairs.

"Gobber says-"

"Oh _Gobber_; don't listen to _'im_'!" She still looked amused as she gently shook her head again, "He has a big mouth with lots of words spewing forth; but never the mind for _such_ things. That's not his speciality."

Hiccup agreed by bobbing his head up and down, thinking back to their rather awkward talk not even a day prior.

"Whatever you decide to do, Hiccup, don't forget that Astrid will always support you" she pecked his forehead, stroking a few bangs out of his face, "as will I."

Smiling down at him, Valka felt Hiccup wrap his arms around her for a tight embracement, before they gradually split and finished climbing down the final steps.

* * *

><p>"What did you talk about?" Astrid questioned curiously as Hiccup approached her, Valka walking off to their shared home, Cloudjumper trailing behind.<p>

"Err...nothing! Nothing big...just...planning for tomorrow." He waved his hands and arms around, trying to make it look like it had been a loose, everyday conversation.

Astrid giggled, "Really now?" She threw her hands around the same way her boyfriend did, earning a furrowed brow from said man.

"I don't _do_ that with my hands!"

"No, you don't." Continuing with the actions, Astrid imitated Hiccup's voice again as she so loved to do.

Both burst out in laughter.

"You are too flattering, Astrid" stepping forward, he grabbed her arms, holding them tightly, "but I'm the chief, and you know that mocking the leader of the tribe is quite rude and not lightly seen upon." He smirked at her.

"Oh no" she feigned shock, "what punishment awaits me?" The blonde Viking bit her lower lip, trying to stop her grin from exploding.

"Hmm, well, that's not easy to say." He mustered his best, most serious facial expression, "I cannot treat you mildly, for I have to set an example in front of my men."

"Of course you do." She nodded several times, his hands still wrapped around her forearms.

"But maybe I shall let you off with a kiss."

Astrid giggled, pearly teeth being displayed, "I can imagine a many Viking fearing such a punishment."

"Thanks..." her laughter only increased at his miffed visage.

Freeing her lithe, albeit strong arms from his grasp, she swung them around his neck, still grinning as if there were no tomorrow.

"Hiccup, you will always be a babe."

"Thanks mother."

Moderately punching his chest, chuckling some more as he winced, eyes widening with pain, Astrid buried her face into his neck.

"And I will always be the stronger Viking."

"I'm not so sure about that." He had wrapped his arms around her waist by now.

She pushed herself away softly, eyeing him with suspicion, "Is that a challen-"

Yet he claimed her lips before she could complete her sentence.

* * *

><p>AN: **__Hope you enjoyed this chapter. __**PLEASE**__**
do **__review,__** even if it's just **__a word__**. Knowing you guys
actually read this and like it is what I need in order to keep
posting, otherwise I'd just feel too demotivated. It only takes a few
seconds, my dears!_

_So **__review,__** for baby Nadders and Gronckles! :)_

5. Chapter 5

_**A/N: **Once more, I want to send lots of ****love**** and ****happy****
****thoughts**** to all of you. You guys are amazing, wonderful,
beautiful people; I love to see all those favs and alerts and
reviews. ****PLEASE**** keep it going, I love to read your thoughts, no
matter how short they might be! _

_To my dear reader ****"unicorns"**** - thanks for indicating those small
mistakes again, I am a perfectionist myself but of course overlook
the one or other thing when it's my own work, which I read often just
to make sure, but only find time in the middle of the night...You'll
be glad to know that I quickly corrected them.

>And lol, thanks for the sweet recommendation for beta-ing but seeing
as I only really have minor typos here and there, and am very
confident about my English, it really is not necessary. But it's nice
of you to offer and I hope you keep on reviewing, because it's great
to hear from you! :)

_That said, I hope you guys enjoy this chapter as much as I enjoyed
writing it. I'm terribly tired...off to bed I go. _

* * *

><p>Chapter 5

_Yearning, emerald eyes glided across the marketplace, watching as an
eleven year old, beautiful and very feminine built Viking trudged
amongst the crowd of bustling people. _

"_One double-bladed axe, Gobber! And make it big!" He heard the raspy
voice of another Viking request._

_"Large double-bladed axe on it's way, Hoark!" The hunk smith
replied, turning around to face the crackling hearth._

_She took gradual steps towards another stall, picking up a few
knives which she closely inspected. Her hair was braided down the
length of her back; she had decided on that look about eight months
ago, if Hiccup recalled correctly._

_He sighed silently to himself as she turned, allowing him to briefly
view her shimmering, azure orbs. _

She now wandered towards the fruit-baskets on the other side.

"_If yer keep starin' like that, boy, yur eyes will pop out and roll onto the ground towards her." Gobber now chimed in, pointing at Hiccup's mentioned organs._

_The boy quickly righted himself, shaking his head as he frowned, "I-I'm not staring at anything!" he defended, blood dipping his face scarlet. _

"_Anyone, you mean!" He waved his hammer-hand in front of the child's face, one eye shut tight, "No point trying, Hiccup! No one can keep secrets from Gobber!"_

"Yeah, I know that..."

"What?"

"N-Nothing!" broadening his shoulders, the boy grinned sheepishly.

Gobber neared his face, eyes turning into scrutinizing slits, "Back to work, boy!" He muttered, watching as Hiccup shuffled quickly to the hearth.

_With much difficulty, he raised a rusty sword, plunging it into the maroon heat. _

"_You have been observing that Hofferson girl for some time now, lad; has she won yer heart?" He chuckled at the last part, mockingly placing his good hand on top of his chest. _

"_Don't talk nonsense! I-I was just looking at what they're selling on the marketplace. Can't help it if she walks around there too..." his voice trailed off, becoming more silent as he tried to hide his burning face behind his short bangs. _

"_A glad sight for ya, huh?" Gobber burst out into laughter, continuing with hammering onto a piece of metal, forming it into a sharp axe blade, "I know that look! It's the one yer father used to carry whenever he saw yer mother!" _

Suddenly curious, Hiccup peeked up, inspecting Gobber's strained, working visage, "Really...?" Anything he did that resembled his father in the slightest was somewhat of a compliment to him.

"_Oh yes!" he plunged the boiling material into a barrel of salty water, a hissing sound filling the workshop, "She was his sweetheart, and he never desired anyone else." Another rough laugh, before the burly Viking inspected the blade and hammered onto it once more._

"_W-What did father do to..." he was terribly reluctant, and overly flustered, "To..."

>It felt like a near to impossible feat to complete the sentence. The question alone seemed so ridiculous.

"_Win yer mother's heart? Oh he-"_

"HAH! I knew it!" suddenly, a blonde head popped up from behind a few barrels near the end of the shop, "The wannabe Viking fancies Astrid!"

Heart thundering, stomach flipping uncontrollably, Hiccup spun his head around to face the young, freckled Tuffnut, who pointed a teasing finger at him.

Abruptly, he winced, and a second head appeared next to him.

_"You idiot! You blew our cover!" It was his rather strange, wild-looking twin sister, Ruffnut, "Now we won't get all the information!" She grimaced at her brother, punching him again.

—

"_Tche, it's all we needa know!" Grinning like a mad man, the boy turned around, racing towards the marketplace._

Only now did Hiccup find his voice again, shock still consuming his body, "W-Wait! No! You got that wrong, I don't-!"

Yet it was futile. The twins were already skipping along, singing "Hiccup fancies Astrid! Hiccup fancies Astrid!"

The various Vikings all turned around, throwing partially annoyed, partially intrigued looks at the two hooligans, before minding their own business again.

Hiccup's gaze briefly flitted over towards said blonde girl, who stood, with a rather shocked expression herself, frozen to the spot. She then averted her eyes towards Hiccup.

But the boy only swallowed, his own orbs widening incredibly as he ducked behind a working bench, his face hotter than a Gronckle's lava.

He. Was. **Doomed.**

* * *

><p>For weeks they had been searching, and ever since they had found nothing.<p>

The harsh, frosty gusts of a more ferocious winter were announcing their arrival. Snoggletog was only days away from enlightening the hearts of a many Viking.

At first, Astrid and her team left every day to search on various islands, laying low and waiting, observing any strange or obscure behaviour they could identify.

After several empty-handed results, Hiccup decided it would be best to not go out _every_ day, but every _other._

That way, they could help out with the rebuilding of Berk as well, and also, Hiccup would feel a lot better knowing those he held dear were not constantly exposed to danger.

"We were on Magni's Island of Fire for about three hours" Astrid complained, panting as she lifted up the umpteenth large, bulky wooden pole together with Hiccup and stemmed it against a house currently under construction, "Eret was all '_I've got something!_' for ages!"

Another pole, this one she raised on her own, throwing it like a weightless stone towards the pile.

"It turned out all he discovered were remnants of a dragon fight. And some very angry Monstrous Nightmares. And when I say angry" she trailed over towards Hiccup, who had plucked a scroll from his bag and was now making some notes on their stock, "I mean _angry_."

The boy smiled and nodded, "Well, maybe those traps were indeed some older ones, and Eret just got it wrong." He glanced up, eyeing his stressed girlfriend.

She sighed in response, "Hopefully..." He could tell the evident worry in her eyes; this situation was not easy to deal with, not when you never knew for sure.

Hiccup lowered his scroll, stepping in front of her, "It's been several weeks now; nothing has happened. Berk is recovering greatly. I think we should stop these searches." He looked her sympathetically into the eye.

"We should not lower our guard too much." Astrid interjected, frowning at him.

The chief scratched the back of his head, curtly contemplating before he spoke up again, "Alright. We'll do a scouting twice every week. Once, I'll come along, the other times you'll go with the usual team. We see what happens then."

"You can't come along â€" we're gone for hours, in which a lot can happen to Berk whilst in _this_ state."

"But if the dragons-

"A _lot_, Hiccup. Whilst everyone is working, it's important you keep reign. Otherwise we'll have all haywire."

She watched his shoulders slack, a somewhat nostalgic and saddened glitter in his eyes.

"Soon, it'll be Snoggletog" she then started, stepping underneath his gaze, smiling sweetly, "and we can rest then. You and I can do some mapping again." She placed a caressing hand onto his arm, giving him a devious look.

He smiled adoringly at her, "Yeah, that'll be great."

By the time Snoggletog indeed did roll around, their searches had fully ceased.

Valka had decided to re-scout a few islands, and setting up stationary guards on Dragon Island. But it brought them no results, and ultimately they decided that Eret had been wrong.

Said man could not explain to himself what exactly he had interpreted so badly, but finally, he shrugged it off, being rather relieved that the possibility of war had been diminished.

With most of Berk all back in glorious shape, people were now fully

devoting themselves towards the high-spirited emotions of another year of blissful Snoggletog together with their dragons.

Vikings on the back of dragons were decorating houses, setting up the large, shield-covered tree in the town's centre, baking all sorts of wonderful goodies ranging from fish cakes to sweet yak pies.

Hiccup felt pride and happiness swell up within his chest upon the wonderful sight of merry men and women alike.

A slight pang did enter when he considered the festive speech he was to hold in about an hour.

"Excited?" He heard the mellifluous voice of his mother question as she came to stop beside him, both now staring admiringly up at the decorated tree.

Hiccup nodded.

"You'll do great." she assured, smiling herself.

"Have you seen Astrid?" The sudden absence of his dearly held companion this morning had unnerved Hiccup as well â€" Toothless never missed a chance to wake him up so that they could go for a ride.

"I believe she went to the training ground earlier on. With Toothless." Seemed his mother could tell his minuscule anxiety.

He now turned his gaze towards her, frowning in puzzlement, "She took him along?"

"More like they met up here this mornin' during the wee hours." Now that he inspected her face more closely, he seemed to notice the slightly smug expression she carried.

"Let me guess: some surprise and I am to wait until they show me?" He now quirked a quizzical eyebrow.

"Oh I never said that." She kissed his cheek, stroking through his hair briefly before she turned and left.

Hiccup's confusion only grew with the minute; so, to clear things up, he decided to head towards the Academy and see for himself what his girlfriend and his dragon had planned.

* * *

><p>The walk took much longer than Hiccup had liked; without the most rapid Night Fury at your side, or rather underneath your saddle, things were simply...further _away._

He puffed a relieved sigh as he saw the metal construction of the training arena; a silent, yet bustling noise exiting.

"Astrid?" He called as he neared the entrance to the arena.

Suddenly, he heard a hiss, and a shout, and then a shushing noise before quick footsteps approached him.

Astrid chased outside, abruptly halting, her feet throwing dirt and stones all around and creating a tiny, brown cloud.

"Hiccup!" She laughed with fake cheer, "You here?"

Now, the chief frowned all the more, folding his arms sluggishly in front of his chest, "What's going on?"

Was she displaying her arms widely so that he could not see what was going on inside? Or to stop him from moving any closer?

"N-Nothing!" Large cobalt orbs stared hopefully at his.

"Astrid..."

A deep, warbling roar caused the Viking to peek up at the top of the arena, watching purple light blaze up before it diminished.

"Is that Toothless?" What a stupid question, "What're you doing in there?" He took a step forward, feeling Astrid press her palms flatly against his chest.

"Astrid..."

"It's a surprise, Hiccup!" Yet the boy was not pleased with the given answer.

Astrid was just about to mumble a new, more deeply thought-through excuse as to why her boyfriend could currently really, certainly, not enter the academy when out of nowhere, squawking Terrible Terrors shot through the entrance and skittered off in all sorts of directions.

The sight was actually a beautiful one; they all possessed a diverse range of colours, making it look like a rainbow-dipped streak chasing through the sky.

"Astrid! Astrid! They've all headed off now! We can star-" Fishlegs' words died within his mouth as he came outside, now seeing Hiccup stand there.

"Chief!" He called rather sheepishly.

"Fishlegs" came the stern response, "what're the Terrible Terrors doing?"

The female Viking sighed, rolling her eyes in defeat, "Alright, it blew up Fishlegs." She briefly turned to shrug sympathetically at her partner, before turning back towards Hiccup, "It was supposed to be a surprise and we were gonna reveal it to you after your Snoggletog speech."

"What surprise?" He could still hear a growling Toothless inside, and a fussing...was that Tuffnut!?

"Fish-"

"Astrid and I came up with a genius new concept for festive Dragon Races!" the bulky boy chimed in, grinning madly, before he laughed a little sheepishly upon Astrid's dark glare.

"A new Dragon Race concept...?" He was highly curious now, eyebrows furrowed.

"Yeah...to get your mind off of being a chief and to properly celebrate the festival." Astrid smiled at him, the same smug expression suddenly marring her features that his mother had had earlier.

"Go on..."

Without warning, Astrid grabbed his hand, tugging him towards the arena with eager movements.

Hiccup blinked several times, Fishlegs trailing behind as he followed after a few seconds of hesitation.

For some strange reason, all he could think about was the warm feeling of Astrid's smooth, yet strong hand gripping his. It wrapped itself effortlessly around his, sending unexpected tingles across his arm.

However, before he could fully relish the sensation, she already let go, raising her hands into the air, "Ta-dah!"

The young chief, who had absentmindedly been staring at their intertwined limbs priorly, now raised his eyes to see all of their crew's dragons sitting well-behaved in front of him.

Toothless growled pleasingly, red paint marking his face, lines of further maroon dipping his paws and tail in the bright hue. Stormfly fluttered her wings, orange and blue decorating her features whilst Barf, Belch, Meatlug and Hookfang all shimmered in their equivalent dragon racing colours.

"It's a new concept for Dragon Racing; much more complicated and lengthy, but totally worth it!" Astrid spoke with so much vigour, biting her lower lip as her grin expanded, "Instead of sheep, we've got Terrible Terrors, who are a lot more tricky to catch!"

Hiccup observed as Snotlout carried about three to four differently coloured Terror's in his arms, two nibbling continuously at his arm, the others squirming in displeasure.

"Now, Snotlout will let those go!" Fishlegs announced, stepping beside the auburn-haired boy, "And they'll fly off to their home islands." He grinned, buck teeth displayed, "We collected Terrible Terror's from all sorts of islands, all colours too. We marked them, however, with a colour from either one of us; red, blue, orange, yellow and green." He had raised his finger as he explained proudly what they had been working on these last few weeks.

"We trained them specifically so that they'd be suitable for these Dragon Races." Astrid chimed in, bending down to pick up one of the small dragons, "We have stationed various Vikings with dragons on all the islands, and we've made a copy of the main map so that you can see the route we've decided on."

His eyebrows furrowed once more that day, as he glanced over behind Barf and Belch to see the twins with a huge pot of paint and a few brushes. They were dipping dragon tails in all sorts of colours, laughing sneakily.

"I'm...confused..." he finally announced.

"It's pretty easy, Hiccup, even I get it." Snotlout interrupted, a Terrible Terror now biting his finger as he screamed.

Astrid rolled her eyes, "We start off from Berk and go onto the various islands where we spread the Terrible Terrors. We have to fetch them, bring them back to Berk, and place them within our according baskets." She walked back towards her boyfriend, "However, you can only pick the Terrible Terror's that have your team colour on their tail." As an example, Astrid held up one such creature with a blue-marked tail, flapping around eagerly.

She then let it go, "We've split them up evenly, and everyone gets a net to catch those guys. You bring them back here, and continue searching on neighbouring islands for the Terrors. Stationary Viking's oversee it all, although there really are not many rules." She shrugged.

"Instead of the black sheep, we've got a purple Terrible Terror that we'll release and one of us has to find and return! As soon as the purple one has been retrieved, the game ends, and the one with most points wins!" Fishleg's expression was so proud that Hiccup could not stop a sympathetic chuckle from escaping his lips.

"So...that I get this right. We all have an equal amount of Terrible Terror's with our team colour on them spread throughout the archipelago, and we need to find them and retrieve them before the purple Terror gets released, which decides the game."

"More or less." The blonde Viking watched in slight dismay as Ruff and Tuff began chucking yellow paint all over each other, bickering loudly.

"Just like with normal Dragon Racing, except no sheep, Terrible Terrors, and an expanded territory." Fishlegs finished off.

Hiccup nodded several times, imagining the scenario within his head, "That sounds pretty amazing." He turned to face his companions.

Astrid was grinning widely by now, evidently excited, "It's a chance for you and Toothless to get off of Berk and have some fun."

The boy felt another warm, fluttering sensation this time in his chest as he smiled with adoration at his blonde opposite.

She had been planning and doing all this for him, all this time, because she knew he needed the change...

What would he be without her?

"We start as soon as you've held your speech!" Fishlegs interrupted,

bringing Hiccup back down to reality.

'The speech!'

He rushed out of the arena faster than a Night Fury could fly.

* * *

><p>He popped his head up behind a few barrels, peeking around and sniffing the intense, lovely-scented air eagerly.<p>

"These past few weeks we have gone through a lot"

Toothless gazed with amber orbs at his rider, observing his rather strained, nervous stance as he spoke in that quite funny-sounding, mumbling voice the dragon knew all too well.

Ducking behind the barrel again, he sniffed the ground vehemently.

Somewhere...it was somewhere.

He trudged carefully to the left.

"Despite all hardship and all the bale we have gone through, we never cease to come together and unite, forming a strong, resilient tribe of Vikings. And now with the dragons on our side, things are even better."

There was the tiniest hint of a stutter in his voice, and Toothless perked up his ear when he recognized it.

He marched a few steps back. His nose flared, air puffing past roughly tiled scales, pupils dilating.

Where was it?

He popped up his head again behind the barrels, a few of those burly men and women giggling at the intriguing sight.

"I just want to remind you all that-"

Toothless' nose was suddenly filled with the same scent he was trying to find earlier on â€" a wonderful, appeasing fragrance, warm and teasing, alluring him.

The Night Fury wailed.

"And- _Toothless!_" by now, most Vikings had burst out into laughter, swiping tears from their eyes.

The dragon nudged his paint-smeared face against Hiccup's side, causing the red substance to rub off onto his clothing.

"_Toothless!_ That washes out even less than dragon slobber!"

The tirade of laughter was unstoppable now, and Hiccup threw a slightly panicked glance at the crowd in front of him as he stood at the entrance towards the Great Hall.

Astrid chuckled herself, stepping up beside him.

"Vikings of Berk! Members of the Hairy Hooligan tribe!" Her strong, authoritative voice caught everyone out of their reverie, staring at her expectantly.

She paused, observing the crowd for several seconds, before she finally smiled, "Have a wonderful Snoggletog!"

Upon that, everyone cheered loudly, returning to their celebrations as Astrid followed.

Hiccup sighed with relief, now glaring down at his smeared outfit.

"Thanks bud, I can go get-"

Shocking as ice, a cold wave of freezing water washed over him, drenching him to the marrow. Hiccup jumped, every muscle spasming in his body, his hairs standing on edge.

Toothless began to lick away the red, dripping paint from Hiccup's attire, but the taste left a bitter note behind, which caused the dragon to shake his head, his tongue flapping around wildly.

That was not the scent he had been following either.

The young chief leisurely turned his head to the side, finding a chuckling Tuffnut next to a rather smug Ruffnut, who held an empty bucket within her hands.

"Well Hiccup, that should solve your problem." she grinned mischievously.

"_Ruffnut_!"

"Hah! You're in so much trouble, idiot! He's _chief_ now, he can tie you to a boat and set you off onto the oceans so that you hunger to death, or until wild dragons come to eat you." Tuffnut was pointing a finger at her, clutching his stomach with laughter.

"Shut up, you moron."

Hiccup shook himself, a frown returning to his face, "I'm not doing that, Tuffnut. I've got something else in mind."

Raising a suspicious eyebrow, the blonde, female Viking took a step back, her face a grimace.

From behind her, Toothless approached, grinning in his own, gummy way, before he started lurching dramatically, spewing half-digested fish cakes (_that_ was what he had been searching for, just undigested) and dragon slime all over her.

"_Ew!_" The female Thorston cried, staring down at herself in shock.

Tuffnut's laughter only increased in volume, "Look at you, all covered in dragon-slobber! Suits you well!" He fell to the ground,

rolling around as he bellowed into the cool air.

Twisting herself around, angered, Ruffnut kicked him ferociously into the stomach, the young boy now crying with pain rather than amusement.

"Do I wanna know?" Astrid's voice chimed in from behind him as she approached, having snatched a few cakes herself and handing one to her boyfriend.

"Nope." He smiled himself, ignoring the fact that he was freezing due to his wet state and the rather disadvantageous weather condition.

"Hiccup, you're _soaked_." Her facial expression was one of semi-dismay and semi-hilarity.

"I know, but look!" He pointed at his leather outfit, "The stain's all out."

* * *

><p>AN: **__I kind of feel I'm pulling this too much, haha. It was more of a Hiccstrid-y, festive chapter with humour, and not so long.__

The next chapter will contain some mystery, and a bit of thrilling flying-scenes combined with Hiccstrid love. I just adore that couple so much.

So, _**review **__if you want the next chapter__, and some feely-feelz! I NEED ENCOURAGEMENT!_

CHU YOU ALL! *hearts*

6. Chapter 6

**A/N:** Once again, I am sending out **kisses and cookies** to every wonderful angel that **reviewed** during the last chapter. Also, all those that **favourited** and **alerted,** the same goes to you**.** You might not believe it, but every single email I get concerning this fanfiction makes my day better and tells me I should continue writing it. Seriously. I get demotivated so easily, you'd laugh...

_So yeah, this chapter starts with a flashback, but afterwards I delved right into the Dragon Race. So, to help you all **SET THE MOOD**, I highly, strongly, really suggest you listen to **JÃ³nsi â€œGo Do** whilst reading this chapter **(AFTER** the flashback, which ain't long). It's **TOTALLY** worth it, it gets you all hyped up and into dragon-flying-mode-feel. Really. It's what I wrote this chapter to.

>

* * *

><p>Chapter 6

_The algid, salty liquid ran past his skin smoothly; his huge, thinly

membraned wings swinging with sluggish movements to allow him to glide forward without much effort._

_Everything seemed dark, ominous and silent. But not to Thornado.

_

_His eyes sought through the gloom, discovering the tiniest, most resilient aquatic creature slither forwards as he approached. _

A few innocent, tiny bubbles erupted from his nostrils, rising up with gradual grace towards the far away surface.

_His massive jaw widening, Thornado burst forward with all energy he found, snatching up the writhing fish and gulping them down. _

Salt prickled the inside of his maw. Vigour entered his system.

He would need some further goodies for his companions.

Swimming along as stealthily as a Thunderdrum could, Thornado rose up, nearing the glittering, sunny surface of the ocean.

He was about to spring upwards, letting fresh, moist air and warming, radiant rays of sunlight cover his body when a new, strange scent pierced his nostrils.

His pupils deflated, jaw shut tightly as he halted, floating easily in the depths of the sea.

_The pungent smell scratched the inside of his skin, feeling so new and out of place, but at the same time so terribly
familiar._

_Thornado glided forwards, sniffing the water vehemently, following the rather curious fragrance that became stronger and more intense.

_

With every stroke he took, he could feel something bubble and froth within him; this was no unaccustomed scent, _**no,**_ this was something that reminded him painstakingly of home and love, of safe-keeping, of caressing and of protection._

It was the smell of respect and trust as well as power. It was something he had long ago left behind, in order to fulfil a new, higher duty, but which he had never forgotten.

Something that had burned itself into his heart, etched with the finest spikes to stay constant and memorable.

And to his bitter horror, he felt it fade; slithering away from the conscious world to whatever place one travels to at such a stage in life.

_A thrilling, fearful surge of energy filled his system and he jolted forwards like a lightning bolt. _

_Closer and closer did he get, determination flaring to its brightest; he had to save it. _

_He had to save the memory. _

* * *

><p>Toothless swung his wings eagerly, his speed increasing at a dramatic rate as Hiccup leaned forwards in his saddle so that the wind resistance would decrease.<p>

Like a lightning bolt they shot through the sky, clouds crashing into their faces; moisture tainting their paint-covered skin and giving them a thrilling, goose-bump creating surge of energy.

"Here Toothless! It's Odin's Hammer, there should be some here!" The rider mumbled through his thick, leather helmet.

Toothless cried out, wings folding together. Hiccup pressed down on the pedal, the tail-fin mimicking the actions so that his dragon shot like an arrow down onto the earth. Shortly before they met hard, pebbled rock and muddy grass, Hiccup tilted his foot, Toothless expanding his wings and letting the wind carry them safely towards the ground.

The young chief jolted off in mid air, chasing speedily across the landscape. Not far away, something squawked and chattered. Net-bag in hand, Hiccup sprinted along, jumping over a fallen pine tree until he reached his destination.

A red-painted Terrible Terror. Grabbing it quickly, he placed it within the net, the small reptile jerking in surprise but not protesting otherwise.

The Night Fury glided above Hiccup, and just as he neared the edge of a cliff, the boy hurdled into the sparkling, dark ocean, only for his nimble dragon to catch him swiftly, both accelerating across the upper hemisphere.

Within his fluttering, constantly moving bag, three further Terrible Terrors cawed.

"Don't worry boys, you're safe with me!" Hiccup laughed, feeling a wonderful, bubbling sensation within his stomach as Toothless climbed higher and higher, the sun piercing their skin mercilessly.

"Next: Twin Axe Island!" The young chief cheered, crying merrily into the air as his dragon dipped down, raking through clouds and winds and spluttering ocean froth.

He could already tell the faint, dark outlines of said island in the distant, rapidly growing in size as they neared at an unmeasurable velocity, when something interjected his view.

"_Wooh_!" A feminine voice bellowed into the air, accompanied by a joyful caw.

Stormfly barrel-rolled in mid-air, spreading her wings elegantly as she caught her perfect balance. Astrid got up on the saddle, hopping on her dragon's head before she launched herself onto the island.

Hiccup grinned underneath his mask, admiring her agility.

"Come on, Toothless, we can't let them beat us-" But before he could fully finish his sentence, allowing for Toothless to speed up even more, another voice interrupted.

"Seems like you're loosing, chief!" The Jorgenson cried, Hookfang gliding sideways past the Night Fury, "But don't worry, I'll bring us all glory!"

The fire-drenched dragon roared in agreement, sliding past the duo and onto the island.

"Snotlout! Snotlout! Oi! Oi! Oi!" His voice faded as the distance expanded.

"Not with us!" Hiccup leaned forward again, Toothless dashing along.

He flew at a slight angle, allowing Hiccup to hold out his hand towards the earth, and with immaculate timing and precise calculations, he grasped a Terrible Terror without fail.

Toothless need not even slow down.

"Red tail!" Hiccup bellowed after he inspected the creature within his hands.

The Night Fury shot a blissful plasma blast into the air, purple flames flickering before they diminished, smoke passing by in a whiz. Far below, just above the tumult of an ocean, he saw the twins riding their Hideous Zippleback, both heads and riders bickering without pause.

"Fail." The chief shook his head amusedly.

Further left flew Fishlegs; his speed questionable, despite riding a Gronckle.

"Changewing Island now..." The boy muttered, Toothless glancing up suspiciously before he complied and twisted elegantly.

They reached the island in a matter of seconds. Trees grew tall and colourful with the glimmering eggs; Hiccup felt cold sweat gradually accumulate at the back of his neck.

"Careful bud, we don't want any angry mothers at our backs!" He called through the rushing wind.

He had already spotted the reptile he sought, leaning out of the saddle to haul over the small hill and grab his next item of victory, when Astrid's tall and lithe presence obstructed his view. She stood at the Terrible Terror nest, packing what was obviously her blue-painted one into her net-bag, back turned to her boyfriend and current rival.

"Slow down bud, let's surprise her!" He whispered, feeling a smug smirk tackle his lips.

Just before the slender woman hopped back onto her Deadly Nadder's saddle, Hiccup leaped from his own, wrapping his arms around Astrid

who plummeted to the ground with a brief shriek. The boy did not swallow back his loud laughter, rolling off of her and removing his helmet.

"Gotcha there!" He chuckled, jumping to his feet and already having the next Terror in his hands.

"_Hiccup_" Astrid bellowed, getting onto her own feet in a matter of seconds and glaring deathly daggers at him.

"No time!" As swiftly as he could, he pecked her cheek, lurching off the side of the hill and onto Toothless' back once more.

He was assured of his victory, with now six Terrible Terrors in his possession and the purple one being released soon, that he flew back to Berk, depositing his prize into the appropriate basket.

The masses of Vikings cheered and laughed, all drinking Snoggletog-according beverages (thank g_ods_ Astrid had found no time for her infamous _Yaknog_) and celebrating with their own dances and stories, whilst watching riders swing by above their home island.

It was then that the reverberating horn was sounded by none other than Gobber, declaring the release of the most prize-worthy purple Terrible Terror, which, once caught and dumped in the right basket, would announce the end of the match, which would be announced by another blow of the booming instrument.

A new smirk tugged at his lips, "Let's get going, Toothless!" An appreciative roar, and they sped off, leaving behind a trail of fine dust and astounded, applauding Vikings.

But where would the small victory-bringing reptile be? All he knew was that one of the stationary Viking's on the several islands had kept it hidden, and would let it go as soon as the horn sounded. They had purposefully chosen islands not too far from home; the horn was terribly loud, but not enough for the entire _world_ to hear.

"Toothless, we need your instincts and a good portion of luck to find this guy!" Hiccup announced, readjusting his helmet.

Their instincts, however, took them to a small, cave-covered island a little further north-east.

What had he and Astrid named it again?

Ah, yes, Salty Beer Mug. By Thor, one would not want to ask _how_ that name came to be.

Once more, the tearing feeling of chilling wind smacked against Hiccup's body, accompanied by the ever-loud rushing of the tides below, and the distant roars and growls of various kinds of dragons. Thunderdrums sprang further below, a Typhoomerang fluttered somewhere in the distance and numerous Raincutters danced off to their right.

"Maybe he's here." Toothless landed silently, Hiccup crouching below the bushes, sneaking along and having his ears perked for any give-away squawks.

A rustling to his left alerted him immediately; he and the black dragon stood back, hearkening. Something moved, something approached, crunching along trodden branches and juggling pebbles.

"Booh!" A shadow overcame Hiccup faster than he could react; suddenly, he was pinned to the ground with a stirring weight above him. Mellifluous laughter echoed inside his ears.

Removing his helmet, he discovered a joyful Astrid sitting atop his abdomen, giggling cunningly. Her blue-and-orange face paint was slightly smeared.

"Astrid..." He shook his head, beguilement growing.

"Oh yes, It's me, and you are totally busted..." smirking mischievously the way he only knew the twins to be capable of, the girl gradually raised her hand, revealing the purple Terrible Terror he so sought.

"You've got him already!" He was frowning, struggling to get up; but her body on top of his stomach hindered any further actions.

"Which means, I win." Stretching out her tongue in a teasing manner, Astrid jolted to her feet, racing back through the bushes and towards an impatient Stormfly.

"See you later!" She called, but Hiccup had already gathered himself, chasing after her.

"Come on Toothless!" The dragon hopped along behind him.

Just before she reached her faithful dragon's side, the young chief flung himself at her, grasping her back and once more throwing her to the ground; this time, he was pushing his weight onto her.

"You better give me that dragon, milady." His lips curled upwards cruelly.

"Or what?" She panted, smiling slowly.

"Or you'll pay the hard way." Magically attracted, he leaned down, already feeling his pulse quickening and his heart stampeding as he decided to claim her lips before he stole her treasure; yet something intervened, once again.

A scalding, piercing sensation overwhelmed the back of his neck without warning, causing the boy to jerk upwards and pat himself desperately.

"What the-"

The girl beneath him kept her overly complacent expression as she wriggled away to get up.

"Oops, did I not mention that I deployed lots of Fireworm dragons in these bushes?" She gave him a mocking innocent face, shrugging indifferently, as she raced back towards Stormfly.

Meanwhile, Hiccup was still being plagued by those burning dragons, which had snuck underneath his leather flying suit.

"Astrid!" He called with the faintest hint of anger and admiration mixed together.

"Good luck, chief!" She bellowed as Stormfly dashed away above them.

One earth-shaking roar from his onyx companion, and the tiny, glowing reptiles jerked off his skin and slithered away. Never had Hiccup felt more relieved. Never had he desired to be bathing in snow, either. He swore he had burn marks all over him.

Astrid had to pay for that...

Clambering onto Toothless' back, they catapulted into the air, wings expanding as the Night Fury effortlessly caught up with his blue-painted counterpart.

"Look at that, up on your feet so fast?" Astrid mocked, grinning as she swerved to the side.

"Toothless is the alpha, in case you have forgotten!" He had his helmet stuffed inside his net-bag, which was currently empty.

"Oh, how could I?" she increased the distance between them, yet Hiccup already closed in, his dragon perfectly approaching the blonde Viking's side.

"I think you'd be better off handing me that Terrible Terror." He could not help but feel self-assured.

"You sure? Because one way or another, I'd win."

"Oh really?" He quirked an eyebrow at that.

"Of course. You tend to throw your sheep into my basket; I can imagine you doing the same with my Terrible Terror."

Indeed, Hiccup had the habit to throw his sheep into Astrid's basket on occasion; something he was accustomed to whenever they had Dragon Races as a team. It would come as no surprise that Hiccup and Astrid always voted to be on the same side. Hiccup did not like competing with his girlfriend, for she took challenges much too seriously...

Despite them deciding to continue the Dragon Racing tradition without customary teams except when specific events called for it, the young chief still had the tendency to drop off his prize in the blue goal, instead of the black one. Much to the pleasure of his girlfriend. And his dismay.

Granted, he did enjoy seeing her jubilate everytime she was announced champion. So, maybe half of those times he did it on purpose. Hiccup did not want to stand in the way of Astrid's current Dragon Racing Champion title, anyway.

They needed no contest to prove who the real champion was, after all. And with Hiccup as chief now...

"This is different" The auburn-haired boy objected, the grin still present on his lips, "and it's my Terrible Terror, to be precise."

"Can't see your name on it."

"I can write it on there, if you want."

A squirming sound alerted both of them of the reptile's obvious protest to being part of this ridiculous sport.

"Hiccup, only three words: Come get me." Throwing him a challenging glance, she dived towards the ocean, her Deadly Nadder fluttering excitedly towards Berk along a different route.

But one Hiccup knew all too well.

He followed, Toothless mimicking the actions.

Soon, they were flying through various stone constructions, then towards the entrance of a few caves, through which the teal reptile darted without a halt. Darkness consumed Hiccup and his partner, but thanks to his dragon's great capability of seeing within the obscurity, it was no problem. He trusted his talented counterpart to find the correct route out, and towards Astrid.

Abruptly, however, Toothless slowed down, swinging his wings vehemently against the flow.

He roared.

"What's up, bud?"

At that moment, the chief realised that he could not hear Astrid nor Stormfly anywhere in the distance. Yet they had been only seconds apart...

"She's hiding." Hiccup detected, patting Toothless appreciatively, "Alright, let's trick her! Plasma shot!"

The Night Fury obliged, shooting purple flames into the distance. Sluggishly, they descended, landing as lithely as a cat on the stony ground and listening intently to any audible movement. A tiny, brief tumbling rock told him that Astrid must have been hiding only ten metres in front of him.

"I think they're gone, Stormfly." She now giggled, proving Hiccup's assumption, "Let's-"

Without warning, he stood behind her, towering over her slightly shorter body.

"You sure about that?" he whispered back, causing the girl to stare, wide-eyed, in bewilderment at him.

"How did you-"

"I'm that good." a nudge to his side caused him to stumble a little, "I mean, we."

Toothless nodded in approval.

"You're not getting it." Astrid crossed her arms defiantly in front of her chest, raising herself onto her toes.

He observed as she challenged his eyes, holding his malachite stare fearlessly. Her orbs glittered a deeper, more indigo hue; her cheeks were flushed, a bare pant leaving her lips, silky hair sticking to her face, framing it's wonderful, hearty shape. Blue and orange had become a blur upon her, making her look almost wild.

"Maybe I don't want it..." he uttered absentmindedly, feeling his stern facial expression soften as he lost himself in the detail of her features.

"What...?" She frowned in the slightest, irritation taking over as she lowered her arms.

The young chief took that opportunity to grasp her arms, tugging her closer to him as he crashed his lips onto hers. She was evidently surprised, initially muttering against his lips before she gave in, returning the gesture and moaning pleasingly.

They separated by a hair's breadth, eyes fixated onto each other's.

Hiccup felt an overwhelming amount of emotions consume him, and all of a sudden, the mood was set. This would make it perfect, complete, and memorable. So he believed, before doubt started to peck at the corners.

"Astrid, I-"

What did Thor, or Odin, or maybe even Freyja have against him that they disrupted every intimate moment he tried to enjoy?

"Found you two! Eugh, kissing in the dark, get a room!" Tuffnut complained, Ruffnut and their dragon right behind them, "Now hand over that Terrible Terror!"

Hiccup sighed, Astrid briefly leaning into him before she took a well-measured step away from all of them, "No chance!"

And before he could count to three, she had sped off on Stormfly, Barf and Belch already following.

Only Hiccup was left behind to wonder.

* * *

><p>AN: **So yeah, what's Thornado doing here, in this flashback? Maybe I just missed him. I have an obsession with Thunderdrums, really. But maybe he'll just play a major role later. Anywho, I thought it only fair to bring back the big(ger) guy. But you won't find out until later what he's on to, maybe._

_Some Hiccstrid-y Dragon Racing bonding time. I loved writing this. And yeah, lotsa fluff, as will be in the next chapter. It'll get seriously serious again, but just don't forget, this is with a strong

Hiccstrid influence, so it'll be more profoundly displayed than in the movies, even. Bear with me m'dears!_

_Oh, and, for all observant eyes â€" at the end of HTTYD2, Hiccup chucks the black sheep in Astrid's basket. I really wanna know why...so I thought I'd mention it in here. _**EDIT:**_ After having seen Dawn of the Dragon Racers, a small edit was made ;P_

>

Please **review** if you liked this chapter. **A word will do**. As long as you **review** (do I get appreciation for the lame rhyme? Yes? No?)

***hearts***

7. Chapter 7

**A/N: **Sorry this update took so long! One of my favourite Manga of all time just ended and I was a heap of emotions (and still somewhat am). But do not fret! I am not going to give up my fanfiction here, even though I might take time to update sometimes. I still have some chapters left already written (which I just need to work over again) so STAY TUNED!

Some humorous Hiccstrid fluff in here, I guess. I wrote this scene way before I started reading HTTYD fanfiction and was surprised to find that I am not the only one who has imagined Astrid and Hiccup in such a situation. Read on to find out what I am talking about, and, **enjoy.**

**Don't forget to review at the end, my stars!**

* * *

><p>Chapter 7

Ultimately, the match was won by none other than the every-day champion, Astrid.

Hiccup had lost by one point; after giving chase once more, he found the obstruction of the loud twins and their explosion-causing dragon(s) together with Snotlout's terrible commentary and Fishleg's interruptions too much to deal with.

Yet he was as proud as any Viking could be to announce the beautiful blonde rider winner, handing her...well, handing her a decorative Snoggletog necklace made of intertwined flowers and berries.

Astrid smiled nonetheless; for she had beaten her boyfriend and savoured every second of it.

Following a few teasing remarks by said girl, the whole of Berk; or most of it, at least, found themselves inside the warmly designed Mead Hall, drinking beer and cheerily singing to commemorate the festive days.

The first Hiccup spent with his mother, and without his father.

"Happy Snoggletog, my boy." She kissed his cheek, ruffling through his hair as she leaned over his shoulder, "I'm glad to be here with you." Cloudjumper peeked over too, clacking his nose excitedly as he took in the delicious smell of fish cakes floating around on metal platters throughout the hall.

"Thanks mom, you too." The chief replied, seated on one of the many benches and tables, drinking what looked like warm yak milk.

"Valka!" Someone called further away – a feminine voice it was, and said woman stood up, smiling brightly as she approached whomever desired her attention.

Hiccup smiled affectionately, glad to see his mother being able to integrate so speedily into the company of their tribe. He would have thought for it to be a lot more troublesome; but after several weeks of persistent reluctance, all it took was a good old friend to bring up some puny story from the past and her friendships were all re-established. It was nearly as if no time at all had passed; except for the fact that they now lived with dragons, and did not fight them.

Valka was one of a kind, no doubt, as was Hiccup. But nonetheless, people loved her; some even apologised for not having heeded her words so many years ago.

And despite her trouble of adjusting to human company again rather than reptilian one, her old habits from before twenty years ago returned like second nature, having only slumbered all this time. She no longer had to be ashamed of her doubts about the cruel nature dragons supposedly possessed; on the contrary. They appreciated her knowledge and opinion more than ever. She seemed to glow in her 'old glory', as Gobber had put it a while back.

Meanwhile, her Stormcutter tried to sneakily steal some of the warm goodies the men of Berk were munching, without being discovered.

With his sharp, sickle-like wing end he poked through a handful, ducking and sliding further towards the back of the hall, where Toothless wagged his body delightedly.

Cloudjumper twisted his wing towards the black reptile, allowing him to snatch up half of the stolen goods, licking his lips contentedly.

Hiccup smiled warmly, observing the two dragons exchange gestures and celebrate the festivity in their own way, as Vikings bellowed and carolled merrily all over the place.

Leaning against his right hand, emerald eyes lazily watched the commotion without much enthusiasm.

"Here you are!" he nearly jerked when Astrid plummeted down next to him, half-leaning against his frame, "I was looking for you, but with so many Vikings it's hard to get through." She laughed, her facial expression as bright and blissful as it had been since the start of the day.

The sight made his heart flutter happily, and he curtly forgot his lament.

Yet Astrid seemed to have a perfect sense, or telepathic powers of which she had still to inform him about.

"You're sad." She whispered, a sympathetic look washing over her face.

Hiccup sighed, not responding.

"I know...but you're chief now. Berk is only doing well if you are doing well. Be happy; celebrate him, like everyone else."

Hiccup nodded, pouting, "Yeah, he would want me to do that..."

"No" She lightly grabbed his hand, "he would expect you to do that, Hiccup." twisting his head to look her in the eye, he saw all her emotions swirl within her azure irises, gradually rubbing off on him.

He managed another smile; a sincere one.

"And to help you" suddenly, a new voice chimed in; a little more insidious than the boy liked, "we have created this wonderful, Snoggletog-according drink!" It was none other than Ruffnut, smiling her devious smile as she heavily placed a sloshing mug of something in front of him.

"Drink all up, Mr. Chief." Tuffnut cackled, sitting on the other side of the auburn-haired man.

"What is this?" He frowned down at the dark brown, yet still see-through mixture with grand suspicion.

Anything the twins served you was question-worthy. No doubt.

"It's great stuff!" Snotlout now crashed down on the bench opposite the couple, simpering like a true hooligan as he gulped down several litres of the brew, "Whatever it is the twins mingled together, it tastes fantastic." He could detect the faint slur within his voice, "Better than Astrid's-"

"Hold it, Snotlout!" The girl interrupted fiercely.

"It's alcohol..." Hiccup mumbled, frowning disapprovingly.

One thing his father had always warned him about was alcohol.

"Too much and yer get a headache which could blast boulders. As a free lad it is okay, my son, but as a responsible chief with lots of drunken Vikings, yer better stay on the safe side and keep away from that stuff. You'll only regret the next mornin'" _

And he had spoken that with a mead of his own in his hand, whilst clasping Hiccup with the other, causing the boy's teeth to nearly jump out.

"Thanks, I'll pass." He raised his hand appreciatively, pushing the mug to the side.

"Don't be a spoil-sport, Hiccup." Astrid laughed, grasping the wooden flagon and blindly downing several gulps.

Her face, if at all possible, brightened even more, "Wow...guys, what's in there? This is amazing!"

But the two shrewd Thorston children only smirked cunningly, "Can't tell you; family secret." Tuffnut nodded several times at that.

"Hey guys! Have you tried this brown mead already!?" Fishlegs came hobbling forwards, an oversized jug of his own clutched between his chubby fingers.

"Seems like you've got everyone in the mood." The chief was not sure if that was a good or bad thing.

Yet.

A throb-creating punch into his arm caught him out of his reverie, "Don't be a troll, Hiccup, enjoy the day! _Celebrate_!" There was a slight hint of demand within Astrid's voice as she held her mug towards him.

Against all odds, and simply to make all the fellow Viking's around him _stop_ all the staring, he took a small sip.

Immediately, a burning, acid-like sensation trickled down his throat, making everything pulsate and him gag; he was sure he would spit fire any second. Then, he actually _tasted_ the aroma: a mix of berries and herbs, leaving behind a wonderfully warm trail inside his mouth and now the pit of his stomach.

"It's...not bad." He commented, positively gazing at the mug, then handing it back to Astrid, "But I'm not getting pickled like Snotlout."

Said Viking pointed at himself, faking an innocent expression as if to say _'What? Me? I'm not drunk!'_

His friends all snickered at that.

* * *

><p>He could not believe his current predicament.<p>

It seemed so odd; out of the norm, impossible; _a myth_.

Yet here he was, an inebriated Astrid having her arm swung around his shoulders as he tried to semi-carry, semi_-drag_ _her back to her house.

After she turned sixteen, her parents had found it a good idea for her to move into her own complex "one they built together after her design. It was not far from the academy, and, to Hiccup's weak surprise, closer to _his_ house. Once she would marry, so her father spoke, she would build a new house with her husband. All the while handing Hiccup a knowing look he felt all too nervous about.

Valka was on her other side, holding her as upright as possible as she and Hiccup approached her hut, a fluttering Stormfly within her little stable right next to the entrance.

She cawed eagerly upon the sight of her beloved rider.

"Histoarmfly..." she mumbled incoherently, her feet sometimes finding footing before they continued to drag.

"Only a little bit, come on." Hiccup whelped, kicking the door open as he and his mother pushed her inside.

"Where is her bed?" Valka questioned, signalling for Cloudjumper, who crawled in behind them, to light the torches.

Everything suddenly became ablaze with warming, maroon hues.

"Upstairs." Hiccup mumbled, "I'll take her, you can let go."

Carefully, the elder Viking removed Astrid's arm from around her neck, gripping her shoulder as the young chief hooked his arm underneath her legs, clutching the upper side of her body and heaving her up with a little strain.

He was knackered himself â€" she did not weigh as much as one might think, with the all the muscle power she proved through her punches, but he felt his own energy reserves approaching a dead-end. Nonetheless, he found the will to carry her upstairs towards her cot.

"No...no not t'day..." she muttered, her head swinging against her chest.

Hiccup could not determine what she was talking about, so he simply ignored it. Then, her head fell back, eyes squinted together tightly.

He reached her beside, leaning down to lay her upon the wooden construction as she began to thrash around.

"No!" She called and Hiccup struggled to not topple over and drop her.

"Astrid! Stop!" He held on tightly as her arms flung around, her feet kicking wildly, "Calm down!" He then managed to place her on top of the bed, gradually letting go.

She seemed to gradually cease her movements afterwards. A moan subsequently escaped her lips; one that sounded more like strain and displeasure than anything.

"She'll be terrible in the mornin'" Valka interrupted, standing next to her son who gazed down at his girlfriend with worry, "I can make her a special mixture Gothi taught me long ago; it'll help her. But I need to get some ingredients first."

He turned his eyes to face his mother, "How long will it take?"

"Half an hour, maybe...depends." She sighed, "Can you stay here, with her? To make sure she does not get up and starts wandering aimlessly around." She whispered with some amusement, and Hiccup chortled himself.

"Yeah, I'll guard her."

Patting his back, she turned around, stepping down the stairs.

He knew she had left when he heard the door creak open and then shut again.

Sighing, he turned to sit on her writing-desk stool, watching her writhe weakly on her bed. Glancing around, he found a thin sheet of yak-fur on the floor, picking it up and draping it over her body.

He knew that she would be more cozy if undressed a little; yet he felt rather uncomfortable with the thought of doing so himself. She was his girlfriend, granted, and he did intend on marrying her and never letting her go; but those were steps he still had to take, partially, and he feared a somewhat stiff atmosphere between them if he overstepped boundaries now.

She would punch his guts out if she found out the next morning, which, she would. Literally.

Arching her back, a grimace plastered to her face, Astrid turned, moaning and muttering some more. Hiccup perked his ears, trying to catch what she was slurring, but nothing made any sense. It was a jumble of words he only knew Snotlout to speak when a lightning bolt hit him.

Which was a hilarious sight, really.

But not with his girlfriend.

"Astrid." He uttered, inching forwards on the stool and placing a gentle hand onto her forearm.

Leisurely, the girl lengthened out, turning to face her counterpart with half-lidded eyes.

A swirling streak of sparkling colours played within her irises and pupils as she gazed lingeringly at Hiccup, observing his figure.

Had he always looked so terribly handsome?

The edged jaw and long, somewhat sweet nose. Those shimmering, beautiful orbs he had for eyes " all colourful and deep. Hair that fell in auburn tufts across his forehead with heavy eyebrows and the slightest hint of stubble accompanying his chin.

Hiccup felt something within him flip with anticipation; was it his heart? Stomach? Nerves overreacting?

He could not quite interpret the meaning behind her facial expression, which greatly unnerved him.

"Astrid...?" he carefully questioned.

"Heihandsumm..." she maundered, blinking heavily.

"Was that _hey handsome_?" He frowned with puzzlement.

Her smile was the only answer he needed.

"Spoil-sport..." he was thoroughly surprised at the fact that that word had left her lips clearly.

"Why that?" The boy chuckled in response.

"You didn't dringg..." she puffed the sentence out with so much strain, panting afterwards, rolling her head back to face the roof.

"Someone had to take you home; wouldn't have of been capable had I drunk too."

"'xcuse..."

Hiccup chuckled silently, watching her turn around so that her back faced him, "Come on Astrid, no reason to feel offended. I'm here, am I not?"

Once more, she muttered some incoherent terms he did not really _want_ to decipher.

Shrugging, he placed his arms onto his legs, tapping his one foot onto the wooden floor as he waited for his mother to return with the curing concoction. Just as he inspected the interior design of her private quarter; taking in the drawings and maps she had displayed, the family portrait, her favourite axe and a few knives and daggers as well as scrolls and ink scattered on her desk, she moved again.

Even before Hiccup could divert his attention and look at what she was doing (probably shuffling in her weak attempt at slumber), she had stood up, trudging determinedly towards the stairs.

Wide-eyed, the chief jumped to his feet, stepping in front of her.

"Whoa, whoa! You're going nowhere, milady."

She giggled upon that, "Shaddup..." she muttered, pushing him eagerly towards the steps.

"No Astrid, you're staying. _Staying_."

How he wished Toothless were here with him right now; but the large, obsidian reptile had returned to their shared home to nap away â€" he was awfully tired from all the sweets he had consumed.

The girl now fully leaned against him, a feeble giggle sounding from her mouth. Once more, her muscles worked to oppose him.

"Astrid, _no_." He tried to sound strict, wincing innerly at the fatherly tone he now carried as he carefully nudged her

back.

"Borin'..." she grumbled, her head resting on his shoulder by now. He seated her delicately onto the bed, wanting to push her upper body back so that she would lie down again.

But Astrid abruptly grasped his flying suit, dragging him down with her.

Hiccup found himself stumbling, tripping against the edge of her bed and smacking down right on top of her. Only his arms kept them separated.

Now, they both lay on her bed, a giggling Astrid grinning beneath him as she still gripped him vice-like.

"A-Astrid..." he was blushing furiously, his face dipped bright crimson.

"I'mstilstwonga..."

"Yeah, you're strong, okay, now let go, Astrid-"

His metal foot lost balance, and he jerked forward, fully crashing onto the lithe blonde.

She found it all the more amusing.

Stemming himself upwards with his hands, Hiccup frowned down at his lover, trying to muster his best glare but finding himself incapable of doing so. She looked so sincerely happy in her own drunken way, that he was reminded of all she had done for him these past few weeks.

No matter where he went, she followed and supported him, during meetings and speeches, negotiations and problems with Vikings, all the while scouting the islands for possible threats. Even then, she found the time to develop an intriguing new Dragon Race concept, just so he could do what he sought to do so often.

Get out of this Hel-hole of responsibility and just fly until his heart was content.

Everything, she had done it all just for him. To make him happy, and so he forgot his woes " the ones from the past and the presence. His heart churned with unadulterated love, a smile creasing his lips as he gazed down at her jovial form.

This.

This was what he wanted; everyday, all of his life. Her, by his side, his second half next to Toothless. He wanted to shower her in as much love as she currently presented to him.

The desire became so grand that he could not fight back the urge to lean in and kiss her. And as he did so, he tasted the faint aroma of that mischievous mead-mixture Ruff and Tuff had served them with, and which, ultimately, had caused Astrid's current state.

Moaning pleasantly into the kiss, Astrid's pull on his suit

strengthened.

At first, Hiccup found himself incapable of resisting " between the fragrance of said brown mead and fish cakes, she had that very feminine, sugary, _Astrid_ smell to her he so loved.

The one he simply could not withstand.

Deepening the kiss, he found her giggling every time their lips briefly separated, before they needfully latched onto his, pulling and nibbling, pressing herself against him.

Against all odds, listening with a lot of strain to the inner, roaring voice that echoed inside his mind, the chief pushed away, increasing the inches between their faces.

"No, not like this..." he panted, rolling off of her and onto his back, next to her body.

The blonde Viking, out of breath herself, seemed to understand.

"Stay the night." She whispered so lowly he barely caught it.

Stretching out his arm hesitantly, he wound it around her frame, pulling her closer, and Astrid took the opportunity to lean her head against his chest, hand smugly placed on top of his abdomen.

That was how Valka found them merely an hour later; wrapped up in each others comfort, sleeping soundly.

Draping the fur on top and setting the beverage down onto the table with a letter next to it, she left.

* * *

><p>AN: **__So yeah, I imagine Valka not to have __that__ many problems integrating back into Berk, at least in this FF. After all, she was a part of the society before, and now they changed, but only in favour of views and opinions she has had all along. She is like Hiccup. Once Hiccup saved them all from the Red Death, he was viewed as a hero and treated completely different than before; with new-given respect and seen with authority. So I believe it could be similar to Valka.__

_Anywhos. Thanks __SO MUCH__ for the wonderful feedback last chapter, and please, keep it up. I love reading every __**review**__ I get, and some of you write such wonderful, endearing things it brings tears to my eyes. __**PLEASE KEEP IT UP! You are my muse, my friends.**__

_Don't forget, next chapter will have some __**Hiccup/Astrid awkwardness**__ totally worth the read, so __**shout out**__ if you want that ASAP!_

*hearts and Night Fury babies*

**A/N: **I hope I haven't made you all wait too long! I was a little busy as of late, and then worked on my other HTTYD fanfiction seeing as inspiration struck! But do not fret, all is well. I have ordered the HTTYD2 DVD (it comes out later here) and its on its best way to me. Once I have my HTTYD movie marathon, I'll be crying with feels and probably typing like a madman. Or woman. Whatever.

Anywho, a **GREAT BIG THANKS** to **all** of you. I love you guys, really, your reviews are the friggin' best thing I get every day, and every notice in general about this story in my e-mail inbox elates me. **PLEASE KEEP IT GOING!** The more feedback I get, the more eager I'll be to write on.

_Now enjoy this chapter, all for you lovelies!
>

* * *

><p>Chapter 8

He awoke when the piercing, glistening streaks of balmy light poked at his face, beckoning his eyes to open up. That, and the sudden shuffle atop his body; a weight stemming itself upright, a yawn and a small yelp.

"Hiccup!?" He heard the groggy voice of his girlfriend speak in astonishment.

Finally deciding to chance a glance, he revealed his emerald orbs to the bright sun beams, wincing primarily before they finally adjusted. The first thing he noticed was her incredulous facial expression, the faintest, yet most evident trace of crimson colouring across her cheeks and her frozen, immobile stance.

She was leaning on her elbow next to him in her bed.

Several seconds passed by; _too _many, for Hiccup's liking, in which he abruptly tried to remember the events of last night, before they all fluidly returned to him.

"Nothing happened." He spat out immediately, sitting up and rubbing his tired eyes.

"_What_- where, _why_!? _Why_ are you in _my_ bed _with me_!?" As soon as she finished that sentence, she flinched, her fingers delicately touching her forehead.

Everything was throbbing at a terrible rate, and Astrid felt bile rise within her stomach. But she was sure as Hel that it could not be due to the fact that Hiccup had seemingly slept in the same bed as her last night.

Or could it...?

"Nothing happened, Astrid." Hiccup assured, glancing to his right where he found a mug and a note from his mother.

_ 'Give her this in the morning_

Love

Mom'

"That does not explain why you're-ow!" Once more, she recoiled, cringing as her brain throbbed aggravatingly within her skull.

"Here," he held the mug towards her, "drink this."

With a suspicious peek, Astrid observed the mixture for a handful of seconds, scrutinizing it carefully.

"Is that Ruff and Tuff's strange mead-mix from last night...?" Suddenly, a trail of memories returned to her brain, reminding the girl of the amount of alcohol she had consumed and how, without warning, she had had blackouts.

"No, it's mom's after-mead-drink for the morning." her boyfriend laughed with a smirk, pressing the jug into her hands, "Take it, it'll help."

Gingerly, Astrid grabbed around it, being cautious as she nipped on the terribly bitter brew. Yet despite her cringing increasing, It seemed to help.

"I guess I was out of it last night?" She now questioned silently.

"Yeah...mom and I took you home. You were really...energetic..." Hiccup scratched the back of his head, feeling sheepish, "I knew you shouldn't have consumed that stuff. I mean, the twins made it..."

She nodded meekly, "Thanks..."

"S'okay..." he mustered a smile.

"Did...I do...anything..." her brows furrowed and she bit her lip all of a sudden.

"Yeah...?"

"Anything...you know." nodding at him, she desired to not complete the sentence.

Catching her drift, at least so he thought, he shook his head, "No you did not do anything embarrassing. I mean, you punched Snotlout into unconsciousness after he tried to grab your butt, and you sang a lot, but otherwise..." Trailing off, and viewing her rather amused expression, he smiled again.

"I did?" her mood was already improving.

"Yeah, it was a sight to behold."

"And we did...?" With her index finger, she pointed between them nervously, taking another gulp of her drink.

"N-No, nothing! As I said..." he had to blush himself again,

"Just...you know..."

Astrid arched an apprehensive eyebrow, asking for him to continue.

"J-Just...me and you, kissing and falling asleep; the usual."

'_The usual!? Seriously Hiccup?'_

"Oh..."

Should he be happy? Or disappointed?

Because of her lack of a response.

"W-Well, anyway! I'll go find Toothless and...you know, take him for a flight." He grinned innocently again, stepping out of the bed and turning towards the stairs, "I-If you need anything, mom's around and...she can help and...I'll...be...back soon."

He did not dare look at her as he hopped down the steps and left with a swiftness he did not know he possessed.

* * *

><p>Hiccup could not deny the fact that he had felt awfully tempted last night. The way she looked and laughed, beckoning him to continue; and then the kiss.<p>

He had kissed Astrid many times before, and he loved every moment of it; he even dared to initiate kisses himself, which she liked, despite her commentary five years ago that '_no one__ kisses me'.

—

But something had been different last night.

There was...something _more,_ and Hiccup could not, and partially _did _not, want to place a finger on it. At least not _yet._

A terribly unnerving sensation overcame him as he glided across the morning sky together with Toothless. He watched Berk from high above at first, before he decided to be a little selfish and call for his dragon to tour a bit further away — the race from yesterday had ignited nostalgia within him. He loved travelling between all the islands and discovering new worlds. But due to his position as chief, the latter was pushed far into the background. Yet the former could still be undertaken, after all.

"How about we visit _Frigga's Hearth, _bud?"

Warbling merrily, they dipped down, chasing towards said island. Half way there, Hiccup suddenly remembered he still had his para-gliders within his flying suit, and that he _could_ use them again. Now that Toothless knew how to split his back fins, they would catch the corners more efficiently.

"How about it bud?" Hiccup mumbled through his helmet, "For good old times' sake?"

A guttural rumble told him that Toothless was not too thrilled, but

neither too bothered. So Hiccup chuckled, throwing himself off the Night Fury's back, pressing his chest-button so that his wings and gliders came forth and caught him in mid-air.

He whooped eagerly, "This is the feeling!"

Toothless shot a few plasma blasts underneath his body, allowing the heat to lift him a few inches. Soaring along, they now descended speedily towards their destination, yet just as Hiccup readjusted his stance, wanting to swerve back onto Toothless' saddle before they crashed, a strong, pounding wind came up against them.

Hiccup found himself spiralling upwards, losing control.

"Whoa! Toothless, help!" The dragon roared, fluttering towards him, yet the winds were persistently strong.

Both dragon and rider were flung across the firmament like meaningless feathers, strongly getting off-course. Hiccup tumbled and rolled, his view speedily alternating between turquoise sky and fluffy clouds as well as the deep, indigo oceans, cliffs and green rock with the sun always peeking around somewhere in between.

"T-Toothless!" He shouted against the gusts, his dragon wailing and growling as he himself spun without pause.

Just in time, the winds stopped as they both approached a small island closely cropped with low trees. The Night Fury righted his position, dashing towards his best friend and wrapping him protectively within his wings as they crashed against wet grass, sliding across. Numerous feet later, they both came to a halt.

Sighing with relief, the obsidian reptile unfurled his wings, allowing for a shocked Hiccup to crawl out.

"What was _that_?" The boy queried with exasperation, pulling his helmet off.

Toothless shook himself, stretching his limbs and murmured something in dragonese.

Diving a hand through his auburn strands, Hiccup gazed upwards, inspecting the island they landed on. Strange, never-before seen trees clustered this place " their branches hung low, their leaves were large and soft, vines dangling wildly around and beautifully blooming flowers clinging to sturdy bark. Gradually, he dared to approach, feeling the hard, bulky contour. He decided it would not hurt to investigate a little.

The deeper the chief delved into the forest, the tighter the trees grew together. Soon, he feared he would not fit through, not even considering that Toothless would have all the more of a problem.

"What is this place?" He whispered in astonishment, large oculars consuming the sight, "Why did we never discover it before?"

His dragon puffed some hot steam between his nostrils,

growling.

"You're right, bud, those strong winds must've been the reason. But I cannot remember there to have been such currents near _Frigga's Hearth_."

Wailing lowly, Hiccup understood his friend's response as an approval to his words.

He kept on trudging across squelching green stalks of crazily growing grass, the darkness becoming more opaque with every minute that ticked by.

The Night Fury whined, evidently displeased and unnerved, but Hiccup ignored his protest as he stepped onto a fallen tree, hopping off, kicking a few rounded stones to the side as he landed, turning and spinning, glancing around.

"There's something here." He uttered very quietly as he gazed into the gloom, but Toothless found the dense trees to block any further passage. He roared at the young Viking, calling for his attention. Said man twisted his head to glance around his shoulder, "What's up?"

A nod from his obsidian head told him all he needed to know. Toothless would not fit through; Hiccup either continued on his own, or they returned, leaving the island. But the nagging feeling that something grand and mysterious lay before him did not leave the boy alone.

"Stay here, bud, I'll go see what there is and then I'll be right back."

His dragon obviously did not like that idea; he had hoped Hiccup would simply give up.

No such luck.

Reluctantly, he sat down, grimacing forward.

Continuing along, moss spreading across large boulders and rocks that now appeared, the Viking found himself climbing between crammed undergrowth, an exotic, peculiar fragrance invading his nostrils.

"That's so weird, I've never smelt anything like this-" he managed the last hurdle, finding himself suddenly in front of a sight he would have never, in all his life, believed to be existent.

His heart pounded vehemently against his ribcage, his eyes widened so far they might as well have popped out. His breath hitched "and everything stopped moving for a brief moment.

"-before..." his words were lost as he drowned in the view ahead of him.

This was just...

* * *

><p>Hiccup was not astounded when Toothless nearly crashed against the cliffs of Berk, just flapping a littler higher, missing the edge by millimetres as they dashed towards the centre. As he so loved to do, the boy pounced from his dragon's back before said being even got the chance to land safely on the ground.<p>

His legs carried him rapidly towards...wait, where was he going? Halting in his movement, Hiccup spun around agitatedly, looking about for the right person to find. He had to show her, _had _to â€" and his mother would be quite flabbergasted too, he was sure!

Lightly grabbing a Viking who stood a little off, he questioned him sternly, "Have you seen Astrid?"

Said Viking, a little taken aback, shook his head.

The auburn-haired boy sighed, continuing on his pathway and asking various other inhabitants of Berk if they had seen the blonde, athletic girl, to which everyone simply shook their head or responded with a 'no'.

Hiccup then concluded that she might still be at home, seeing as she had been rough this morning, and, considering that only two hours had passed since then, she might still be catching up on much-needed sleep.

So his sprint took him all the way back towards her hut, past merchants on the marketplace and busy, bustling Vikings who were doing some last maintenance here and there. Just as he turned a corner, a small gathering of Gronckle babies blocked his passage. The small reptiles squeaked and squabbled merrily, chewing on some tiny pebbles. One curiously looked up at the chief, large, dark eyes blinking with utter innocence.

"Hey there little guys." He peeked up, discovering the stable these children were supposed to play inside, "Someone take these Gronckles before they-"

Barely spoken, already one of them wrinkled its face, sneezing loudly as a booming, fiery burst erupted from its maw and blew against a neighbouring market stall.

"-spit fire everywhere..." he trailed off, sighing in annoyance as he leapt forward, grasping a piece of rope tied to a large bucket. He tugged, and the content spilled all over the burning embers, smoke rising.

Immediately, a few Vikings approached to clean up the mess and take the infant reptiles back to their stable.

"Sorry chief!" three or four of them muttered as Hiccup nodded, placing a placating hand in front of himself as he advanced.

In the distance he could make out the contours of Astrid's residence â€" blue paint up against the sky, with yellow and red and some brown which came from the wood. His face lightened up â€" when she found out...

He jolted forwards, eager to get there, when he knocked into a civilian and his cart full of wooden pillars. Upon the contact, the

construction swivelled, the contents flying out and scattering all across the dirtied ground.

"I'm sorry!" Hiccup grimaced, helping the fellow Viking pick up the dowels and replacing them.

"No problem, chief, thanks." He man hurried onwards, as did Hiccup.

He prayed to Odin that no other obstacle would interfere, after thus facing a few Deadly Nadder's that were not doing as told (one roar from Toothless and they obeyed) and a few people who begged for his advice and judgement before he went on.

Honestly, being chief could be so terribly _annoying_.

After many, countless obstructions, and feeling the need to thoroughly breathe through, for his lungs were screaming, he halted outside of Astrid's door. It was reticent around its perimeter â€" Stormfly was not in her stable, which caused Hiccup to primarily believe that she was not home had he not heard the evident sneeze from the window upstairs.

"Astrid?" He called, opening the door and entering.

He was answered by silence first, until he heard some mumbling upstairs. Was she...talking to herself?

"Astrid!" He tried again, making his way to ascend the steps when something blocked him.

From above, Eret slowly trudged down, a frown marring his features.

"Eret...?" Highly irritated, Hiccup stepped back, allowing the man to stop in front of him, as mute as the night.

His girlfriend followed a little afterwards, a worrying expression on her face.

"Hiccup..." she bit her lower lip, and the boy did not like the atmosphere one bit.

"What's up, guys? What're you doing in Astrid's house?"

"I could not find you, chief, so I thought the next best person would be Astrid." He took in a large gulp of air, "I don't know how to say it without causing a ruckus, really, but" he shook his head, scratching the back of his head â€" he was stressed, and evidently so, "I fear the Bewilderbeast has returned..."

* * *

><p>AN: **Anyone wanna tell me what Hiccup found? And who else has bought the HTTYD2 DVD? What do you guys think of Dawn Of The Dragonracers? **Please,** leave your **feedback.** I might not always respond, mostly because I feel like I'll just say stupid flustered stuff, because seriously, you guys overwhelm me with happy feels._

For all who do not know, I have started an HTTYD AU story (not modern, still ****canon**** world) called ****"The Awakening"**** - it's about Hiccup having grown up with dragons, instead. If you are interested, please check it out and leave behind your thoughts. I'd be so honoured.

*spreads love through Terrible Terror shaped brownies and Stormcutter biscuits*

9. Chapter 9

**A/N:** I will spend my time during this A/N to give a huge ****THANK YOU**** to all you ****reviewers.**** Do know that I read every single review with love and happiness and that I jump with glee when I see one in my inbox. You make my day, show me I am to write this on no matter how demotivated I feel. I know a lot of you follow this, but I still sometimes believe I'm talking to an empty audience-room when I don't hear any response. I will list all you wonderful people who have reviewed up until now, to show you how much I appreciate your wonderfulness. I got quite a few touching words that cheered me up and had me gaping and blushing! But generally, knowing you actually spent your precious time to leave a word or two is really honourable for me. I really hope any of you silent readers that are reading this A/N feel encouraged to review too; c'mon guys, we're a community here, one fandom. Don't shy back, show me you enjoy this story and that It's worth updating! Because that's what every author needs in order to want to continue; an engaged, communicative audience! I don't always respond, I know, probably because, as said before, I feel like a dork sometimes! You overwhelm me that all I can say is ****THANK YOU** from the bottom of my heart******! I love you all, you are amazing, fantastic, wonderful, great people! That includes every Guest/Anonymus reviewer too, just so you know!

So here goes nothing and everything:

****_A HUGE THANK YOU TO TQCarl, Surfy, Danielle, loneknightd, hutch92, PuppeteerOllie, SharKohen, unicorns, Talkin' Fishbone, Ludmila Wase, One-Crazed-Up-Dragon-Fan, jlghighlander, YmeYuCCa, MrHoneyXBadger, Toothless, Randamwriter, RealmOfDawn, MyDOG, oreoplatzchen, littlemachines, cheliytoon, shadowanimel, JohnnyC55, dreaming-about-dragons, NightsAnger, Malik The Night Angel, LorreVarguhl, Christian Fangurl, tsK91, HawkTooth, That'sJustSoJae, drcheesel23, Parsat, A literalist and every guest/anonymus reviewer! YOU GUYS ARE THE BEST! *gives you all Night Fury and Deadly Nadder cookies*_****

****_P.S.: _**_For those of you who believed Astrid was cheating on Hiccup last chapter; I actually wanted that effect. Wanted to scare you a little, then scare you again. Lol. I'm mean, I know. But c'mon, Astrid adores Hiccup; like she could ever love anyone else! Eret is a bro, if you wanna put it (so)! Haha!_**

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 9

He was not sure if storming on the back of a dragon like a yak gone wild was his favourite passage of time. But currently, he was doing just that. _Again._

Skullcrusher swerved to the right, causing him, Astrid, Valka, Fishlegs, Snotlout and the twins to mimic the action, finding themselves gliding over endless miles of vast ocean.

"As far as I'm concerned" Fishlegs threw in, allowing Meatlug to flutter a little closer to the chief, "there is no island from here for another ten mile radius at least."

Hiccup frowned, returning his gaze towards the back of the well-built _leader_ of their voyage.

"Eret!" He called, and watched from the corner of his eyes as Cloudjumper suddenly gained in height, flying above them.

Said man peeked over his shoulder, furrowing a brow.

"Where are we going?" It was a hard feat shouting against the winds that were currently blasting into their faces. The gales, once above the sea, were always a lot more ferocious than on land.

Pressing down harshly onto the pedal, the auburn-haired man allowed for Toothless to speed across, spiralling over to glide parallel to the Rumblehorn.

"It's not quite an island, it's something else." Eret answered, not chancing a look at the chief and instead keeping his oculars focused in front of him.

Confusion spread within Hiccup's mind, but was soon replaced by Valka's call and Cloudjumper's roar, as she pointed below them. Eret smirked; yet not in a smug, knowing way, but in a rather tragic manner that told him he was not pleased with himself at all.

"Hiccup, look!" Astrid bellowed from behind him; large, cerulean eyes shocked.

He did, and his breath hitched.

There, in front of them, was a extensive expanse of solidly frozen, glistening ice, forming a drifting platform with oversized spires cresting makeshift hills.

"Is that what I think it is?"

Eret nodded, and all riders descended.

* * *

><p>"Pretty chilly on here." Tuffnut commented after they had climbed off their dragons.<p>

Hiccup gave them a signal, and all winged reptiles stayed back, glancing nervously around themselves. Toothless especially seemed agitated and was more than irritated with Hiccup's command to stay behind. He knew from his memories that any situation in which he was separated from his beloved rider never was a good moment.

It always ended with chaos.

They belonged together, for they were a team, after all.

He wailed, hoping the boy would change his mind, yet Hiccup continued to warily stagger along the slick, plain surface. Twice his prosthetic slipped, and twice Hiccup just about managed to catch himself before he smacked to the ground.

Realising his problematic situation, Astrid approached, grabbing his hand in her own and slowly walking beside him. He blinked upwards from their intertwined appendages to her face, and saw, despite the dark bags underneath her eyes and the evident fatigue in her stature, her smile.

'We'll do it together' her silent words echoed within his conscience and he was more than glad to have her here with him.

Which really, was no surprise. They were a team, after all, just like he and Toothless.

A quick glimpse over his shoulder and he caught the Night Fury's rather restless expression " he understood his dragon's lament, but he did not want them anywhere near in case the Bewilderbeast was around. That being sensed other dragons and they were in no shape for a fight. Alpha and all put aside.

"I'd like to build my summer hut on here." Tuffnut once more blurted out, nodding admiringly to himself.

"You'd find it sinking into the depths pretty soon; this island's only temporary." Eret now spoke up, staring at the huge, turquoise constructions sparkling within the sun " fine, shimmering droplets of water were accumulating as the frozen substance began to melt. Everything glowed a deep teal, purple and magenta.

"Really? That would suck. Or not?" Throwing a questioning glance towards his sister, he was answered with a cruel smile.

"Yeah Tuffnut, would be awesome to see you sink with your hut to the bottom of the-"

"Shush!" Valka placed a hand behind herself; she was currently at the front of the _expedition_, a frown ever-present on her face.

"But-"

"Shh!" Astrid intervened, placing a finger in front of her lips.

A stifling quietude overcame them. The only sounds now echoing off the ice hills were the arrhythmical _drip, drip_ noises of melting solids and the reverberating clacking of their feet against the smooth ground.

"He is no longer here." Eret whispered, still concentrating on any ruckus that they might be missing.

Valka nodded in agreement, relaxing, as did everyone else.

"This was most definitely created by the Bewilderbeast." She confirmed, looking Hiccup in the eye knowingly, "It is not old; a maximum of three days. And that is only the estimated time since he has _left_."

"Any signs Drago might've been here?" Fishleg's tried hard not to stutter with fear as he shrugged his shoulders, keeping his hands close to his chest. He was being paranoid, he knew, but the whole island gave him the chills. On more than one plane.

"No, but we cannot tell for sure."

"Wonderful. We have a mad Bewilderbeast and an even madder madman out here somewhere." The Jorgenson chuckled his arms into the air, defeated, "He might attack any day and we'd never know."

"It's quite a bit away from Berk." Finally, the chief spoke up, seemingly staring at nothing in particular, "We don't have closer information; we need to investigate further."

"So the traps _were_ real â€" he is trying to set up a dragon army again!" Eret's shocked tone of voice caused everyone to avert their attention towards him. He stood straighter now, "He is probably going to challenge you once more." There was a deadly hint to his mutter Hiccup did not like the sound of.

"Then he shall, and we will be prepared. We'll return to Berk immediately" at this point, he had raised his voice, "and everyone shall undergo dragon training. I will gather and tame as many dragons with Toothless as I can. And we'll need a team to scout and find the Bewilderbeast's and Drago's whereabouts."

He returned his gaze towards Eret, "I would like it if you lead said team. Choose your men however you please."

Now shifting his body to his mother, he spoke up once more, "Mom, I'll need your help with the dragons. Fishlegs, you will lead the training units on Berk."

"Got it, chief!" Determined, despite his fear, the chubby boy bobbed his head.

Astrid, who was still next to him, holding his hand to support him, squeezed it.

He had completely forgotten about their close proximity and open display of affection. He knew she had taken it in case he slipped again, but suddenly a blush crept across the bridge of his nose considering they were not alone. He knew it was a little dumb to feel embarrassed; they were an official item since long now, heck, he'd even kissed her in front of everyone and did not give two tosses about their presence. Yet he also felt like a weak little boy, clutching his father's hand out of angst, scared something bad might come and snatch him away.

'Stupid, you're stupid.' he chastised himself internally, shaking his head.

He met her eyes full of determination yet still so awfully tired. For a curt moment, he believed to see something else flare up; a need he

could not quite name, but which he dismissed.

"Astrid, I..."_ don't want you on Eret's team despite knowing you'll be more than useful there; but I fear for your safety in case you __do__ find the Bewilderbeast and I'm no where near to help you,_"think it's best if you join in the scouting team again." He nodded to strengthen his declaration.

Astrid returned the gesture, a weak smile poking her lips.

"What about us?" Snotlout questioned, pointing at himself and the two troublemakers behind him, who were busy trashing some small clumps of diminishing ice.

He sighed, "You'll either be scouting with Eret, taming with me or helping Fishlegs at the arena. You choose."

Why did he regret those words the moment he had spoken them?

"Awesome, let's go train then! We can blast the arena and other dragons up!" Ruffnut fisted the air excitedly.

'_Ah...__**that's**__ why...'_

Shaking his head, the chief turned around, pressing his free hand to his lips and imitating the sound of a Night Fury. His companions all joined in, calling their respective dragons. Toothless, Stormfly and the others fluttered by, landing swiftly and allowing their riders to climb aboard.

"As soon as we return to Berk" Hiccup shifted within the saddle, adjusting his feet as Toothless already spread his wings, "you set off to your tasks. _Immediately_."

* * *

><p>Flying back towards their home town, Hiccup felt a strong weight pulling at his heart, limbs, and generally whole body.<p>

"I hope we don't face another war..." He muttered, feeling his eyes sting from the gusts that dried away the moisture.

His dragon swivelled lightly, grunting as to make his presence noticed.

Hiccup placed his hand warmly on Toothless' head, smiling, "We're in this together, bud. We'll face whatever comes at us, won't we?"

The onyx reptile twisted his head so that Hiccup could make out a sympathising chartreuse orb. He puffed some air, warbling deeply. It was as if he were confirming Hiccup's words, reassuring the boy of what he needed to know.

'We are together'

He felt the sudden urge to lean forward, placing his forehead against the rough, scaly skin of his companion, shutting his eyes for a brief moment.

"Hiccup?" The tender voice of his girlfriend worriedly interrupted his silent moment.

Abruptly, he glanced up, staring at her as she and Stormfly approached.

"I need to talk-"

"Chief!" Skullcrusher suddenly descended above them, Eret's serious expression from earlier not having deterred in the slightest, "I will take my leave west from 'ere. My men are not far, doin' some further investigation. They are all I need for the moment."

Hiccup's eyes flew from the man back to Astrid, who gave him a somewhat stressed look.

Eret seemed to have caught on, for he spoke up once more, "Astrid, you join us once you and Hiccup have sorted things out back on Berk."

"Okay."

Nodding tensely, the auburn-haired man dismissed the former dragon-trapper, who split silently from the group and took his way.

It was not long before they finally landed on Berk. Fishlegs took Snotlout and the twins with him to the academy, preparing for training sessions whilst Valka decided to head off with Cloudjumper to locate the various dragon breeds they would need.

His Night Fury stretched himself, yawning and displaying his pink maw.

"How about we grab some fish for you, bud? You're tired and hungry, it seems." He stroked the side of his dragon's face before he started walking towards the next food-basin.

"Hiccup!" A hand wrapped itself around his wrist, and the man halted in his steps.

It was Astrid, and she seemed more agitated than ever.

Now he remembered that she had previously wanted to talk to him about something, yet that circumstances had caused them to be interrupted, as seemed to be a habit of fate.

"Everything okay?" He inquired, despite the fact that he knew no, nothing was okay.

He wanted her by his side more than anything right now. He needed her here, with him, as he prepared all of Berk for what might be an inevitable war.

Not only morally and with all her strength and good advice, but also simply to know that she was there and she was okay. Any second she spent out there, hunting for the enemy was a second closer to death.

He already lost his father.

He could not lose her.

She, of all people, meant the most to him. He knew it sounded harsh, considering his loving mother; but they had spent so little time with each other, still. He had much to learn about Valka " they were so similar, and he adored her for her knowledge and warmth, but she was still somewhat of a stranger.

Yet Astrid had accompanied him all of his life; granted, the first half she ignored him at most, and all he could do was admire her from a distance. But she had been there, and she was real. There was nothing he did not know about her.

She was his soulmate, for a lack of better words. Simply and plainly put; a part of him he could not, and would not lose.

"I..." she struggled for the right terms, avoiding his eyes all of a sudden.

"It'll be okay." Hiccup reassured, whispering soothingly, trying to semi-convince himself too, "No matter what Drago is planning, we'll burn his boat and sink him to the ground." He smirked at her, and she smiled back.

"I feel horrible." She finally declared with a bitter-sweetness to her voice Hiccup did not know she possessed. He could see dampness forming around her eyes.

He had found her close to tears before; most of these times were related to situations where she believed him to be dead. But never had it been like this. Astrid was known for her Viking strength and unwavering, cold demeanour. She never admitted to puny feelings. It had only just recently occurred, during the years that they were officially an item, that she displayed a somewhat more tender, loving side.

But it never involved tears of sorrow. Heck, it never involved tears in general. Despite every disagreement and quarrel she had had, with him or someone else, tears were never a part of it. Astrid had too much tenacity for those.

Yet even so, he saw something crack remorsefully within her, and felt his own heart twist sickeningly upon the unusual display of emotions.

"Why would you feel horrible?" With leisure movements, he took her hands into his own, stroking across the backsides as his gaze softened considerably.

"Because it's my fault." She was biting back a sob by now, he could tell, not wanting to lose it in public.

And because he could equally tell how much of a struggle she put up trying to preserve her image as a strong, independent Viking, he tugged at her hands, pulling her behind a storage hut where no one could see them.

"What is your fault?" He was frowning again. Freyja was probably blessing him with more wrinkles by the age of twenty than any one

Viking would have with fifty.

"Drago, attacking Berk, I messed up." Her voice cracked, and she scrunched up her face, shaking it vehemently as she bit her lip.

He felt utterly puzzled, his furrowed brows creasing all the more, "_Y-Your_ fault? What're you talking about?"

Taking in a shaky breath whilst avoiding his stare again, she pulled her hands out of his grasp, "I told him about Berk. About the riders. About you. He attacked because he felt threatened. I wanted to intimidate him, make him back away. Give us time and a chance, but...he decided to go for the kill..." Astrid trailed off, losing volume as she spoke, her gaze somewhat distant.

Hiccup's facial expression softened instantly as he relaxed. He had believed her to be telling him something far worse; but this?

"It was not your fault, Astrid. He had the Bewilderbeast; one way or another, he would have won that war. All that matters is that, in the end, we beat him. Toothless was placed under his influence, and because of that, he learnt to fight it. For me. And us." He gestured to the surrounding town, indicating that every civilian and dragon mattered, "If we had been prepared or not; we wouldn't have made it, and Berk would be in no better shape despite it all." Suddenly, he felt guilty; guilty that his beloved girlfriend would feel so culpable for something she clearly should not be blamed for.

After all, Drago had attacked the sanctuary first. It had been his plan all along, as Eret had informed them afterwards. How was she to know that he had just reunited with his mother there?

Her shoulders were bouncing violently, her face lowered. It was near to frightening seeing her lose her composure so rapidly. It did not seem like Astrid at all. Delicately, he cupped her cheek, pulling her face up to look at him. An astray tear trailed down and he rubbed it away with his thumb, "It was not your fault. You did what you believed was best. I love you for that."

No longer capable of holding them back, she let the salty liquid spill as she buried her face within his chest, grasping him tightly.

"I'm sorry..." she mumbled, her whole body shaking by now.

He wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close to him and holding her near to possessively, "It's okay. We're here."

'And that's all that matters.'

Somewhere in the distance, Toothless howled.

* * *

><p>AN: **A bit more angsty and...erm...tense chapter? I literally wanted to present to you some actuality that would slightly turn the mood of this story. That a lot more drama and action are to follow. And just so you know, next chapter will start off with **QUITE** a dramatic scene. It will involve Astrid...anyone want to

guess what will happen? Oh and, what do you guys think happened to Drago? Where's he gone? Is he with the Bewilderbeast or not? Where is this said being anyway? What's the plan? So many questions, all needed to be answered. I would LOVE to hear your speculations...or anything else :P_

In case you are wondering why Astrid is to go on Eret's tracking team; they both have Tracker Class dragons. Hence, they are the trackers, thus, they do the tracking. LOL. You probably knew that, but I wanted to clarify just in case...

_So yeah, once more I thank you for your reviews and totally hope you will continue reviewing after this chapter. Tell me how you feel! I love reading them all, so please, bombard me!
>

_Good grief I'm tired. Why am I always so tired? Urgh...*grabs a warm yak milk and blows candle out*
>

10. Chapter 10

_**A/N:** Kind of hard editing and working on a chapter when your aunt sings "JINGLE BELLS, JINGLE BELLS!" the whole time! **

>_
>Suuuuuper sorry this is so late! It was meant to be up like, a week ago? But I had absolutely no time. I am currently not even home (not even the same country!) and was thus very stressed with flights and Christmas presents and what not. _

_Here here goes my update before Christmas for all of you! See it as a gift for the season's celebrations or not, however you wish. But know that your reviews touch my heart and I am more than blessed to receive such wonderful words from each and every one who actually took their precious time to write something down. I really DO hope you review still, especially as it IS Christmas (tomorrow)... :D
_

_But for now, ENJOY! This one is action packed! _

**NOTE:** I HIGHLY recommend listening to "***Fire and Honor" by Audiomachine** as you read this - it's no vocals, don't worry, and REALLY REALLY REALLY catches the dramatic atmosphere well. Like, ferserious.

So anywho, MERRY CHRISTMAS!

*peaces out*

* * *

><p>Chapter 10

Astrid pushed her legs to their fullest limit, albeit feeling her muscles starting to spasm and cry out in pain and from over-exhaustion.

She could not keep up like this for long, she knew.

Trees whizzed by so rapidly, leaves rustling, grass cracking underneath her boots; everything was a blur made out of ominous greens, browns and greys. The stormy, weather-bearing clouds had gathered up in the sky, everything becoming a dark, hazy shadow around her.

Astrid panted frantically, turning another corner, cerulean eyes scanning her surrounding for the perfect hideout.

'Hiccup...' she thought desperately, wishing with all her remaining will that he were here, right with her. He would know what to do, he would stop this; this _madness_.

Never had the young blonde Viking felt so much fear before.

Alright, granted, she had been pretty fearful when Hiccup faced Hookfang all those years back at their final examination, and when he battled the Red Death and nearly did not make it, or the war with Drago on Berk...

But Astrid had a strong sense of failure suddenly overwhelm her now, as she realised that there was nowhere to go, and no hideout good enough, and that the cawing, grunting noises behind her were approaching more speedily than she would have liked.

And that no one was around to help her.

Immediately she could empathize with her boyfriend whenever he found himself in a similar predicament.

'Stupid, idiotic girl; going off all on your own! You should have stayed with the team!' all the inner chastising was not helping her out, either.

Another growling chirr, flapping wings menacing through the air, slicing into the deafening silence that Astrid only interrupted with her rapid breathing as she came to a gradual halt.

There was an enormous stone slab right in front of her; metres upon metres of ragged, misshaped stone that was in no form climbable.

'Hiccup...' _she winced innerly, feeling her eyes moistening against her will, her sight becoming once more blurry.

A large shadow now loomed above her, closing the space leisurely.

Another loud caw.

Stormfly stood only a few inches from her, amber eyes piercing into her gaze, claws raking the soft ground.

"Stormfly...please..." But the dragon in front of her could not hear her plea. It cawed into the sky, swinging its wings, before it dashed forward aggressively.

'Hiccup...'

Consequently, everything turned black.

* * *

><p>A couple days prior...

"Typhoomerangs should go last. A few Raincutters would not be bad, an' Seashockers, but not too many tidal class dragons, seeing as tha Bewilderbeast is one himself." Valka held a scroll of parched paper in her hand, a charcoal pencil in the other as she listed all the reptiles she considered important for their own defence.

Hiccup listened intently, back in the forge, testing various new saddles he and Gobber were working on.

"I'll get Bjorn an' Mugbeard ta bring us some more of tha' sturdy leather, especially fer tha Typhoomerangs." Gobber announced, readjusting his hammer-hand before trudging back towards the hearth.

"We should start within an hour, before it gets too dark." Valka twisted the parchment within her hands, stuffing it into a side pocket together with the pencil.

Hiccup nodded, not verbally answering her.

"Hiccup, we will be okay" She stepped forward, her hand tenderly reaching out to stroke his cheek. She glowed with her large, beautiful orbs at him, making the boy relax slightly, "there is a strength within Berk that Drago an' his Bewilderbeast don't have. And don't forget, Toothless is now tha alpha."

Once more, he bowed his head, smiling with strain.

Their eyes met, and a sudden wave of feelings overcame him. He saw the sincerity of her words, and the reassurance she tried to so strongly induce into him. He saw all the regret for the past missed years she withheld; all the missed birthdays, first steps and growth spurts and important decisions Hiccup had faced his entire life.

She had wanted to be a part of it. But fear had kept her back.

"Mom..." Hiccup's eyes creased with concentration, and he saw the momentary glitter of hope enlighten her eyes, "It's okay..."

It was her turn to frown now.

"I mean, everything. That you decided to be with the dragons instead of us. It's okay. I forgive you." He felt the urgent need to tell her those words; despite the fact that he had a somewhat bitter taste in his mouth upon the thought.

She had abandoned them, but she did what she thought was best. His father had forgiven her without a second thought, and he had been more than elated when he saw them reunite. This is what he wanted; what Hiccup now desired, too.

Smiling with strength, he placed a hand atop hers, "I forgive you." repeating those terms, he believed it would aid her in comprehending

just how serious he was.

Her eyes sparkled with new found sentiments and he could tell that tears were bubbling to the surface.

Yet before he could view one single droplet roll down, she had clutched him tightly to herself in a desperate embrace.

"Thank you." she whispered into his ear.

He returned the hug.

As Valka separated herself, she glanced to the side. Hiccup followed her line of view, finding Astrid standing at the entrance to the workshop. She had several bags full of material and walked over, handing two to Gobber, and placing three on a workbench.

"Here are the things you wanted." She was talking to the blacksmith at the back, pounding a few metal straps.

"Thank you, lass."

With her fingers, she pulled back some astray strands from her fringe as she, whilst avoiding eye-contact, approached the mother and her son.

"Stormfly and I checked the island of Deadly Nadders, then Eel Island and Black Dust Shores. The dragons are all normal, no traps."

He decided to observe her as she looked at anywhere but him. He noted his mother taking a step backwards from the corner of his eyes.

"Mom and I will be leaving within an hour. You...should go too. Together." The last word was added hastily, in fear that she would decide to leave immediately.

Hiccup wandered what made her nervous all of a sudden. She was fearless and strong, but it seemed she was highly reluctant to join Eret and his team in their scouting and spying mission.

Was she as desperate to stay by his side as he was with her?

"I'll see you then." smiling feebly, she turned, doing the same for Valka before leaving the workshop.

"She worries" Valka now explained, her eyes lingering at the exit, "about you. She told me just the other night. She's scared you will do something stupid." There was the tiniest hint of an amused laugh in her voice.

Hiccup shook his head, "Right. Usually, I do something _crazy_, not stupid, and she's always a part of it..." mirth invaded his heart as he thought of all they had been through together.

All their extravagant adventures and fights. Common enemies, common success, and ordeals.

"We best prepare." His mother continued, "It'll be a long day, still."

* * *

><p>The precise moment Toothless jerked was the moment Hiccup realised something was wrong.

They had been flying across the azure firmament; him, Valka and Astrid, when Toothless suddenly began to shake his head and sniff the air suspiciously for a while. Hiccup had dismissed it as simple dragon gestures, believing that his companion was nervous, or tired, or simply registering other dragons around him. But what a stupid thought, now, in hindsight, seeing as he was the _alpha_. And a Night Fury nonetheless â€” _obviously_ something was off.

"What's up, bud, you found something?" Worriedly, he glanced at the back of Toothless' head, who now gave off a guttural sound.

"Hiccup, what happened?" Astrid was still with them, having decided to follow them to their first destination; it was west, anyway, where she needed to ultimately go herself.

"It's Toothless, seems he caught something."

"Let him guide you" Valka glanced over sternly, "I believe there is something he wants to show us."

And that was exactly what he did.

Suddenly, their route completely changed, and the Night Fury twisted in mid-air, heading in the south-eastern flying direction towards forests and high mountains.

Very quickly, Hiccup and the others found themselves soaring in all sorts of directions, their dragons cutting corners, passing by a deserted island, vast space of ocean and then endless, half-burnt fields and lingering forests. A huge hill now faced them at the front, gleaming with moist, apple-green grass and the scent of herbs and all sorts of blooming flowers.

"Where is he taking us?" Astrid threw in as they had been travelling aimlessly for nearly half an hour.

Hiccup did not respond. They approached the hill faster and faster, until the reptiles swerved and flapped their wings, gaining altitude to pass over it.

Once they reached the other side, their winged friends making a sudden dip-dive for the rushing waters beyond the sharp cliffs, Hiccup realised what Toothless had found.

There, in the depths of indigo fluids crashing against rocks poking out of the surface, the water bubbled and frothed.

"The water's stirring." Valka uttered, eyes enlarged with shock and anticipation.

And before any further commentary could be made, or Hiccup could claim what exactly it was that would rise from there, the very being surfaced. Water crashed from its body, spraying the surroundings, even flying as high as to strike his cheeks.

An almighty roar shook the entire scenery, vibrating off the hills, trees, boulders and cliffs and shaking the thin, wispy air. The Bewilderbeast glowered upwards towards his lethal enemy, Toothless eyes becoming infuriated slits as he growled in response.

Stormfly and Cloudjumper fluttered, agitated, howling along with their alpha.

"The Bewilderbeast!" Astrid cried, holding tightly onto her saddle.

He arose from the waves, deathly ice gushing from his maw as the entire water surrounding him instantaneously froze, all movement ceasing automatically.

Emerald eyes flung themselves in every direction, towards every angle of the brute reptile, trying to find the very person he expected to be with him.

"We need to tame him." Hiccup announced once he could simply not spot nor hear Drago, "He seems to be alone."

"How!?" The blonde Viking had a look of incredulity on her face.

Hiccup, in all honesty, was not sure how they would train this dragon. He was grand, and dominant, and he doubted strongly that the most standardised way of friendship which he had used on Toothless would show any effect.

Training Scauldrons or a flock of Whispering Deaths seemed a harmless feat in comparison to this one; the true alpha of all winged reptiles, a source of brutal strength and unchallenged power.

If it were a normal, lonesome Bewilderbeast, this task would be unbeatable as it is; how could one small, muttering human hope to appease and gain the trust of something so _godly_?

And that was not even the main point; this beast had endured enough hardship and control, being used as a weapon for mass-destruction, ordering dragons alike to abide by his terrible ruler, who desired nothing but chaos and mayhem. He knew no faith in the human species " for it had done anything but proven what greed and avenging characteristic it contained, wanting bloodshed over everything else.

_ 'Good dragons under the control of bad people do bad things' _he remembered his mothers words most clearly now.

"He is...irritated, and only knows fear. We have to show him kindness, and friendship." Hiccup noted as they floated above the roaring beast which now spun, spraying more ice and creating another frozen island.

"Yeah, great, sounds like a plan." Astrid shook her head.

"We need to think this through" Valka interrupted, begging Cloudjumper to fly closer to her two companions, "this is after all the king of all-"

She did not complete her sentence, for Hiccup and Toothless had already acted. They rushed like a darting arrow down towards him, full force.

Hiccup knew this was reckless; that, with all sincerity, he had no chance of appeasing the Bewilderbeast without a good, well thought-through tactic. But he simply could not lose the chance of possibly stopping this war before it had even begun.

Toothless growled some more, trying to intimidate the former alpha. Hiccup sat close by, allowing for the pounding winds to tear at his gear and outfit, for the spraying froth of the oceans to accumulate on his brows and cheeks, and for the sight of the monstrous dragon to increase drastically.

"Now!" He called, and a seething plasma blast erupted from the Night Fury's maw before he spread his wings, the wind pushing eagerly against them and softening his fall. With a twist of the pedal, he swerved, gliding past the length of the Bewilderbeast and zoomed across.

From the corner of his eyes he saw Stormfly and Cloudjumper follow hastily, flapping like eager, yet frightful chickens as fast as they could.

There was an unexpected, tumultuous cacophony of bursting waves as the Bewilderbeast staggered back, shaking his large head before he spun on the spot, more ice spewing across the ocean's surface until a rather large, stable island was formed.

It was then that Hiccup realised the creature had built himself a platform to stand on. Another ear-piercing clamour left his lips, the sky rattling uncontrollably, Toothless shuddering and twisting his head desperately.

Hiccup placed a hand on top of it, "It's okay, he can't do us anything!" he countered with determination, his dragon circling their enemy.

He observed his current foe with strained eyes, trying to figure out what flaws it possibly physically owned. He needed some sort of starting point to distract the creature before he attacked.

Suddenly, he asked himself how the Bewilderbeast managed to spit ice â€" what anatomic feature did he possess that allowed him to freeze it? Back then when they had first battled him, Hiccup did not have much time to actually contemplate what this dragon owned in strength and weakness. Nor did he find a minute to discuss it with his team, especially Fishlegs, afterwards, as being announced chief and having to repair and maintain Berk had priority.

In hindsight, he regretted it much.

"Hiccup!" He heard his mother cry; she avoided the side of the large brute, who spun and spiralled, directing its face towards Toothless.

As the Bewilderbeast cried out for a third time, a response echoed off the hills in the distance.

From behind it, a swarm consisting of a diversity of dragons approached, all hollowing in response.

The auburn-haired chief did not have the time to count the various classes of reptiles, all adamant on getting there and defending their alpha.

"We should leave!" He did not realise that the Stormcutter was gliding parallel to the Night Fury, struggling highly to keep up, all four wings pounding with strength, "It's too dangerous ta fight him as it is." Valka looked highly concerned, begging with her verdant eyes for her son to do as she advised.

But Hiccup was stubborn. A trait, so Valka knew, which he had gotten from his father. He pressed on, Toothless lowering, wings cutting through the winds, rising and falling as he stormed towards the head.

"We'll blast him a little to knock him off; remind him how he lost is tusk!"

He had to tame this wild monster. He had to.

There was no way, now that they had finally found him, that he would leave the monster to keep on destroying under the name of Drago Bludvist. This madness had to end right here, before further lives were lost. Both those of humans and dragons.

He faintly took in the caws and warbles of the other specimen as those fought with what he knew was his mother and Astrid. The latter cried out commands to her Deadly Nadder, sharp quills and scalding fire intoxicating the air, warding off the enemies.

Finally reaching the front of the Bewilderbeast, Hiccup gazed with determination at his small, glowering eyes. He was growling, challenging Toothless for the position as alpha. The Night Fury held steadfast, flapping as he floated expertly in front of it.

He saw it open its maw, and shot three blasts inside. The dragon roared again, shaking, flying its whole tusk in the hopes of knocking Hiccup and Toothless into the ragged rocks.

But the speedy, unholy offspring of Lightning and Death dodged with ease, swinging upwards before dashing forwards.

"Another shot, Toothless!" The Bewilderbeast gradually opened his jaws, a fine display of terribly sharp, vicious teeth being shown.

His onyx companion obliged, the large tidal dragon shaking its head again upon impact, stepping back and slipping on his icy platform. Half of its body snuck back into the water, causing waves to explode and rise nearly three metres high.

Without warning, five Sliquifiers came flying towards him and Toothless, howling warningly. They fired large, acidic shots at them both, which caused them to fling upwards and downwards, skidding past the tidal dragons as those halted in mid-air, glancing behind themselves.

Cloudjumper fought without pause against further attacking dragons, Valka swinging her staff to knock them back, some losing balance and currently plunging towards the churning sea before they caught themselves in the blasting currents of wind.

Astrid faced more and more dragons as the minutes ticked by, an armada of boiling, maroon shots flying her way. She avoided some of them by a hairs breadth, Stormfly fluttering and swinging violently, throwing needles, spewing fire like wild, circling on the spot as the enemy came from every direction.

"It's too many!" He heard the faint cry of his mother; with much frustration she fought off further beasts, but they kept increasing in numbers.

The Bewilderbeast had caught itself, staggering back onto the island, blowing more ice and calling more dragons.

"No, we can't give up. Toothless!" Without needing further command, Toothless, as he swung along the aquatic creature, roared himself, all dragons surrounding them cringing and arching their heads, feeling the power of the actual alpha overwhelm their system.

Some obliged, suddenly turning themselves against the Bewilderbeast and ejecting fiery shots at his head, causing the being to cry out and falter in its standing. Others, however, terrifying the chief, stayed adamant, fighting against the power and continuing to bombard him and the others. Once more, the Bewilderbeast swung his tusk violently in the air, trying to catch Hiccup and his dragon and cripple them into the ground.

Between hot lava balls from Gronckle's and boiling waters from Scauldrons, the Night Fury flew and dodged, plasma shots leaving his maw at well-timed intervals so that other dragons would back off, but he would not reach a six-shot limit and suddenly be powerless.

Toothless fired, purple flames hammering against the body of the large, dark reptile. Hiccup pressed the pedal down, swinging upwards, darting at an unmeasurable speed along his back, ready to have Toothless split his back fins so they'd catch the corner when suddenly, the Bewilderbeast flapped its own wings, smacking both rider and dragon into the side unexpectedly.

Toothless spiralled towards the tumbling tides. The chief himself saw nothing but a white daze of stars, pain shooting up his back and arms, numbing his feelings for a brief moment.

"HICCUP!" He could make out the fading cry of his girlfriend, see his mother and Cloudjumper storm down towards them; the fear and horror in her eyes as she reached out for them, ever disappearing.

But everything just became darker; so terribly opaque that he did not feel the impact of crashing, salty water as it enveloped him and Toothless.

* * *

><p>AN: *_*_I'm evil, I know, leaving you on a

cliffhanger like this. But that just means you GOT to review and tell me what you be__lieve will happen! What'll happen to Hiccup and Toothless? And the Bewilderbeast? Is everyone going to be okay or will someone..._
>YOU TELL ME!

_So, until I am capable of updating next! *gifts you all some Yaknog, Night Fury cookies and Cloudjumper brownies!*__**
>

11. Chapter 11

_**A/N: **And let's just take this moment for me to realise that I got over **100 reviews** and feel like a Queen right now! THANK YOU GUUUUYSS! *throws hearts at you - like, the nice ones, not the actual organs* You are all angels and really, REALLY make me happy. I feel very supported by you and truthfully hope you will continue with your amazing-ness and review until the end - you know now how much it means to me. _

And now...sorry this update took so long; even though I intended to post this chapter sooner, but I had so much stuff coming in between and whenever I DID find time I was too bloody tired. To be honest, even now I'm too tired because I did not get much sleep (due to the baby Night Fury in my bedroom) so I'm sorry for any mistakes I did not catch...Everyone who also reads my other HTTYD ff The Awakening, expect an update there soon too!

Nonetheless: enjoy this chapter and don't forget to tell me what you thought about it at the end! It's lots of Hiccstrid emotional turmoil stuff and such this time...hehe
>Just...emotional fluff and flashbacks...before the action comes back. *dun dun DUNNN!*

* * *

><p>Chapter 11

She never did condemn him for his failures. On the contrary.

Never would she admit it out loud. If ever anyone were to claim she did think as she, truthfully, privately, _**did**_, Astrid would most likely pull out her axe, her face one cruel grimace, and slaughter the person into muteness for all eternity. _

_Because she was simply too embarrassed to say it. It was so un-Viking, seeing as people of her heritage were brutal, remorseless warriors that fought for victory and glory on a daily basis. They were stubborn, never backed down and never, __**ever**__ admitted to puny things such as __**feelings**__. _

**Never.***

_Thus, no, Astrid did not look down upon Hiccup - when he stood in the middle of a devastated, shredded battlefield where mere seconds ago, Vikings and dragons tried to violently rip each other to pieces; the former shrieking, the latter roaring with fury and determination.

_

_She did not scowl furiously, or mockingly, as her coevals usually did, when the lanky boy hung his head, Vikings laughing all around, his father livid as he observed the exaggerated destruction Berk had undergone. _

_If only Hiccup had stayed in the house, or the workshop, the mess would be only half as bad. _

_Snotlout sneered at him, chuckling along with the twins, "What, you shot a Night Fury again? Aww wow, you should be given a medal for that! A __**loser**__ medal!" _

"_Yeah, totally!" Tuffnut added, clutching his stomach with laughter, "With all the imaginary Night Fury's you've killed already!"_

The auburn-haired boy simply ignored their jibes, being forced back, once again, by his father and Gobber towards his hut.

"_I got the calibrations wrong, if you let me work on the-"_

"Stop it, Hiccup. Yer just makin' it worse." The smith would interrupt, shaking his head miserably.

_Astrid sighed deeply, her cerulean eyes following him as he dejectedly left the scene of battle. _

He was definitely not the most burly Viking around, and his character and way of thinking and acting was so different to that of all the others; yet nonetheless, he tried so much to fit in, to be a part of the crowd, to belong to everyone else but especially, to make his father acknowledge him.

Even so, he always failed.

_Despite said failures, he always tried again. _

_The next morning, he would stand up, a tenacious expression on his face as he returned to the forge, hammering and measuring out leather and rope, wood and nails, constructing something new and ingenious to aid him with his eternal hunt after the black killer-reptile. _

_And each time he would face new havoc, like that one time when some trigger pulled and sprang off, smacking Hoark just before he could stop a flock of Deadly Nadders from invading the food storages.

_

_And that time he somehow managed to hurl an axe out into the air, just for it to plummet down like a missile, striking Sven right on the head and knocking him out for three days. In the process, a few maddened Gronckle's were capable of ransacking several huts filled with Viking children. _

He apologised more times than the blonde girl was capable of counting, and always earned himself lingering looks of disappointment and disapproval.

"_That's s'pposed ta be our future chief?" one of the fellow citizens once commented with disgust, "More like our grave stone, if 'e keeps goin' like that!"_

"_Stoick betta look out fer a new successor; his son ain't gonna make it."_

Of course, they were never discreet with their commentary, and Hiccup did hear their stabbing words, but ignored them.

What more was he capable of doing, when everything they said was true?

_And __**still, **__the boy kept on trying. His determination never wavered, his will steeled with every misstep he made._

And for that, Astrid admired him.

_In many ways, she was reminded of herself. For she, being of the female gender, was being underestimated by her fellow Vikings too, who saw her as a beautiful, future domestic wife that would take care of the cooking and do the stitching and conceive beautiful heirs to whomever had the luck of wooing her (or rather, her father). Albeit her wish to prove herself as a relentless, talented dragon-slayer that would be so notorious, her name would be whispered for centuries into the world far beyond Berk. _

That was her innermost desire, which was the reason she trained every day, ready to best everyone at the academy once schooling started, and showing the world just what wood she was made of. She did not give up, and never intended to do so, hence allowing her to feel Hiccup's despair and constant struggle.

She liked him.

_Astrid Hofferson liked Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third. _

_She did not stop her lips from curling upwards slightly when she observed him leave his house the next morning, a slight bounce in his manner of walking. They were similar in so many ways, but Astrid could not have herself give in to __feelings such as __**sympathy **__and __**attraction. **__That would only obstruct her on her path to become the best and most outspoken Viking warrior. She did not need some wispy boy to halt her on her tracks. She had her goal all set, something to achieve. _

Boys like Hiccup, Astrid concluded, were terribly rare and special, but nonetheless, a constant reminder of what Astrid had to avoid; becoming the derision of their people.

And no matter how many times she tended to shift her gaze towards the direction of the forge, wondering what the scrawny boy was up to again now to surprise them all during the next attack, Astrid would never admit the slight, minuscule fondness.

_Astrid liked Hiccup. But no one needed to know. _

* * *

><p>The first thing he felt was a slight throb around his chest area.<p>

Like sparkling, ever-moving water which rippled in the fading sun, light gradually entered his field of vision. With too much strain for

his liking, Hiccup opened his eyes, the brightness momentarily striking him before he was finally capable of clearly seeing again.

It was carved wood and etched drawings on his ceiling. Images of Vikings flying dragons; ones he had created himself after becoming bored of the monotonous sight which brown, curled wood usually was. It was all around the house, Berk and the forests; wood looked the same everywhere, no matter how unique the bark's patterns could be. Hiccup did not want that in the morning's though, when his mind was fresh and spiked with lots of thoughts. His creativity, then, was the strongest, and most demanding.

He gradually took in a large breath, feeling it hitch once too often, trying to sort through his memories.

In the meantime, the throb around his chest was growing, and he had to realise it was more the side of his waist that now pulsated hotly.

It stung and stabbed, every shift of his body causing him excruciating pain. Hiccup winced, squeezing his eyes shut tightly.

"Careful m'boy." He heard the tender, silent voice of his mother speak up. Yet he did not see her.

All he saw were the carvings, the intricate details he had added to scales and wings and-

His mother.

A flash of memories zapped through his brain; his girlfriend screaming out, desperately, his mother racing towards him at an agonizing speed, trying to reach him before it was too late.

The horrible urge to sit upright straight away awakened within him, but he felt himself completely powerless.

"Toothless..." he managed to croak, remembering his obsidian friend swinging hysterically, trying to balance out before they both crashed into the tumultuous ocean, sinking leisurely upon impact.

"He is good; he saved ya, wrapping his wings around yerself. Only got a minor injury in his left wing."

Hiccup winced once more; not out of physical pain, however, but mental one.

It had been his fault. He had been stubborn and adamant on taming that Bewilderbeast, endangering the safety of both himself, his dragon, and his two female companions. His vision fuzzed over, head pulsating terribly, making an inaudible thudding sound at the back of his mind.

"What...happened?" his throat was terribly dry and every word came out strained and slaughtered.

Suddenly, he felt something cool against his lips; his mother's face now came into view, large, worried emerald orbs staring down at him

as she held a mug of water towards his mouth. He gulped it down, all too eager, spluttering slightly.

"Careful." her voice cooled his nerves; he was so glad to see her alright.

Once more, his eyelids fluttered close, enveloping him in darkness as he tried to regulate his breathing, ignoring the wheezing pain that jerked within his abdomen each time he took in too much air too rapidly.

Guilt plagued his system; what a fool he had been.

How had they made it out alive?

As if reading his thoughts, Valka spoke once more, "Tha moment you and Toothless disappeared beneath tha waves, Astrid jumped off her Nadder and right into tha sea, divin' ta save ya. Even though she struggled ta haul up yer Night Fury." She grimaced lightly, "Cloudjumper grabbed onto Toothless, an' Astrid retrieved you from his embrace, bringing you back on Stormfly."

His brows creased, orbs still shut as he imagined the scene with his inner eye.

"The...Bewil...-" A cough interrupted, immediately causing infuriating agony to shoot up his spine, along his arms, legs, and to shriek at his waist.

"We managed ta escape; he did not follow. But you have seven broken ribs, cracked at tha side where his wing smacked ya."

To emphasize this, she touched him delicately at where the wounds were, the warmth seeping through the, now he noticed, bandages that were wrapped around his torso.

He managed to raise his head, peeking down his body. His right leg was still intact, so thank Thor for that. He did not fancy having _two_ prosthetics.

"You were reckless." Valka continued after a long few minutes of stillness. The slight anger with which she spoke was palpable, "And nearly had yerself killed in tha process."

"I'm...sorry." He puffed out, clambering onto all the courage he had and attempting to stem himself up using his elbows.

He winced, agony once more filling him entirely, but he did not want to give up yet, so he continued until he was sitting, leaning against the headboard, panting heavily.

"Yer all blue there, and Gothi said you had some internal bleeding, but tha brew she made stopped those. You were out fer days."

White spots sprang across his field of vision before they finally cleared, revealing his mother's taut expression as she sat on the bed in front of him.

"We thought we had lost you. _Again._" Sorrow and hurt were evident within her eyes, albeit her best attempts to suppress them as well as

possible.

"I know...I was being..." He bit his lower lip, trying to concentrate on the throbbing, for he preferred it a thousand times over the suffocating remorse.

Honestly, what had he been thinking?

Nothing, Hiccup concluded. He had not been thinking at all. All he remembered was that he felt abhorrent fear when considering the possibility of another war, of another loss, of all the suffering to not be over yet when they were all still fighting to adjust and grieve.

All this time, Hiccup had suppressed the death of his father as well as possible. The village needed him; as chief, someone to hold the reigns and show strength, that everything was okay.

Thus, he forced himself to push his personal sorrow to the back, despite him still not quite having concluded with the topic.

He doubted he ever would be able to do so.

"Every man makes mistakes on his way of learning. Even a chief." he admired his mother for the vigour she presented him with, "And whilst a chief has ta protect his people an' home, he also has ta rely on them. We could have won against tha Bewilderbeast, but only as a united force. Toothless still has ta adjust ta his position as alpha â€" learn ta gather tha dragons onto his side. And you still have ta learn ta be chief. There is no shame in doing so."

Her hand reached out, tenderly stroking his scratched cheek, rubbing past the stubble of a growing beard. He had not shaved in days; obviously, seeing as he had been out.

"I'm sorry..." Hiccup muttered again, eyes averted onto his lap in shame, "I should have listened to you guys, and backed off. I let fear control me."

The dragon-whisperer nodded in understanding, her smile brief, and small, but evident.

"We return ta our old strategy; tame tha dragons, prepare our people, whilst Eret and his team pursue tha Beast, so that we find out about any plans or whereabouts."

Reluctantly, Hiccup nodded, knowing that that was the best plan they had, and the most likely to be successful.

Suddenly, he had to frown again, a new question popping into his mind, "Where's...Astrid?"

Was she okay? Was she hurt. Did she get hurt because of him? Why was he only just wondering about this now!?

Gradually, he felt an increasing palpitation within his ribcage.

Valka sighed deeply, and for the tiniest fraction of a second, Hiccup's heart jolted horribly within his chest, making him forget

all physical ache and discomfort.

"She is alright; back in tha forests, venting some air."

His scowl only deepened, "What...?"

"Hiccup. We thought yer had died." Shaking her head leisurely, Valka held his gaze, "Astrid was...devastated, and when we realized yer were okay, just unconscious, she was...well, mad. The lass has been in a terrible mood fer as long as you have been out."

His heart still thundering within his broken ribcage, Hiccup felt nervousness seep in. He had to talk to her, confront her about what had happened and exclaim his regret. She would most likely punch him back into unconsciousness.

Had he not promised to keep out of trouble that involved risking his very life?

Oh yes he had. And already broken it.

"I take it she is physically harassing some trees in the woods." It was the lamest attempt at a joke, really, but he felt like some sarcasm was in need.

Indeed, his mother giggled a bit, smiling, "Aye, that she is."

"I guess...I'll have to go see how she's coping and...apologize." He now avoided her eyes, his head twitching.

"Once you can stand."

Upon her words, Hiccup gathered all energy he had left and forcefully swung his legs over the side of the bed, after having pulled off the blanket.

"Care-" yet already he cringed, a hand grasping desperately at his waist, burning, prickling sensations consuming him whole.

All air left his lungs, and taking in new breaths was horrendously agonizing.

"You are not well yet, son!" Valka's voice was raised, she was somewhat worried and angry.

"I...need to talk to her...and see Tooth-" Once more, he winced, his right hand clinging onto the side of his bed before he, against all odds, managed to stem himself onto his feet.

Why was it hurting so much?

But all pain was welcomed as long as he could talk to Astrid and make amends.

He had to!

"Hiccup!" Instantaneously, she stood at his side, holding his shoulder and arm, supporting his weight on herself.

An abrupt shuffle from downstairs alerted him, and before he knew it,

Toothless had skipped up the steps and was now gazing longingly at him, eyes large and gleeful. He warbled at him, approaching and nudging underneath his arm, helping the boy to stand straight.

"Hey bud...you okay?"

He saw a few stained wrappings around his dragon's left wing, but he was as energetic and good-humoured as ever.

"He's already forgiven ya, but he cannot fly, son, his wing is still healing."

Hiccup nodded at that, understanding the situation, biting his lower lip vehemently.

He could not stop blaming himself.

"Okay bud...how about a little trip per foot?"

* * *

><p>The sharp blade sliced forcefully through the splintering bark, an audible crack following upon impact. Chips of wood scattered on the ground near its protruding roots.

Astrid marched towards it, yanking the weapon out of the trunk with a lot of vigour, before she returned to her spot a handful of feet away, swinging the axe from behind her back and hauling it right towards the same indentation she had just created.

Her muscles strained and sweat started to pool above her brows and generally pearled down her body. She would need a wash after this.

A nice, hot, scalding one that would drain away all her fury and relax her tense muscles.

She bellowed again, throwing the axe for the nth time that day, revelling in the sound of bark being ruptured. Her body began to scream due to exertion. But the blonde Viking did not care.

Once more, she gripped tightly onto the handle of her axe, tearing it out just to smack it right back in again from a distance. The handle felt smooth and well fitted within her fingers, and as she followed the contours, she was reminded of the day her favourite axe had broken.

Devastated, she had taken it to Gobber's workshop, wanting to ask him to fix it for her, but found only Hiccup was present. He, without a second blink of the eyes, immediately repaired it, telling her that he was working on a new structure that would make wielding weapons a lot more comfortable and easier.

When he had presented her with his end result, Astrid was more than astounded, strong admiration filling her. During all the time that she and Hiccup were a couple, the axe became a more prominent reminder of him; his ingenuity, craftsmanship and talent. Whenever they were separated, due to whatever circumstance, the weapon gave her solace.

As absurd as it may have sounded, but to Astrid, it was vital.

Right now, however, she felt a scream urging to leave her lips upon the sight of the weapon, and again, she flung it brutally against the innocent, tortured tree.

"I don't have to guess who you are imagining as you injure that tree."

Her limbs suddenly froze in mid action, the axe swinging to a halt at her side and thumping to the ground. Azure eyes were wide; she felt a turmoil of emotions whirl within herself. A mixture made out of anger, aggravation, relief, hurt and further anger.

Gradually, the blonde Viking turned on her heel, viewing a weakened man leaning against the side of his curious Night Fury, who had, until just now, been observing Astrid in her action.

Astrid did not speak as, with too much strain and effort, Hiccup raised himself, stumbling towards her, hands fisted firmly at his side.

"_What_. Are you. Doing. _Here?_" And she tried with all her might to suppress herself from bursting and lashing out at him.

"I...wanted to see you." His hand flew towards the nape of his neck, rubbing it innocently. He winced, but pretended it was nothing.

"Right now, you are the _last_ person I want to talk to." Still controlling her voice adamantly, Astrid shut her eyes, not wanting to look into those beautiful, glistening emeralds of his and lose all of her resolve.

"I know, I know...just...I wanted to tell you...I'm sorry." His eyes stayed focused on the ground, observing small stones and stalks of grass.

A pregnant pause invaded their conversation, and Hiccup thought she was ignoring him or was contemplating his words, feeling his regret and wanting to stop any possible arguments as well by forgiving him.

But that was just wishful thinking.

Her slicing tone quenched his hope considerably.

"You are sorry. _Sorry?!_" She was peeking in volume, scowling heavily at the man in front of her, "Hiccup, you nearly died because you were being _reckless_; a _stubborn_, reckless, idiotic, troll-brained mutton-head who-"

"Alright, alright!" His hands flew up in consolation, wanting to stop her tirade of terms, "I get it, I'm a jerk, and shout at me all you want. Just, let me explain myself first."

"_Explain_ yourself!?" She had utter disbelief marred onto her facial features, mouth slightly agape, eyebrows now pulled up high, "There is _nothing_ left for you to say!"

"Astrid, please. I just wanted to...I did not want to let the chance

slip of us finally taming the Bewilderbeast and protecting Berk-

"_You nearly died!_" Her voice ricocheted off the hills and the mountains, weaving its way through the forest as she screamed at the top of her lungs, leaning towards Hiccup. He was pretty positive that the entire town had heard her bellow.

He decided to not counter with anything, waiting for her panting to subside and for her posture to relax slightly.

Gulping in a deep breath, shutting her eyes once more, the female Viking crossed her arms in front of her chest, "You _promised_ me you would not do anything reckless. After _everything_ we have been through..." She shook her head, trailing off.

"I know..." He muttered in a pathetic attempt at an excuse, "I hate myself for having been so idiotic, and for scaring you like that."

A deep, guttural wail momentarily had him glance over his shoulder, seeing a somewhat sympathetic Toothless behind him. Hiccup understood what his scaly friend suggested he do, and he complied, taking a careful, albeit painful step towards his girlfriend.

"I promise I will stick to the plan from now on; _I swear_, on my own soul."

Astrid was avoiding his eyes, inspecting with a lot of intensity the splintered bark next to her.

Hiccup took that as a chance to approach her further.

"I won't do anything stupid from now on, at least, nothing that would get me certainly killed."

When he was barely an inch apart from her, she whispered coarsely, "I'm still mad..."

"I know, and you have all right to be mad. Just...don't stop loving me, okay?" He chuckled nervously.

Astrid managed to twist one half of her lips upwards, redirecting her gaze towards him, "As if _that's_ possible..."

"Good." She felt his arms circling her, carefully wrapping them around her waist.

The girl gave in, leaning her head delicately against his chest, aware of his injuries.

He pressed his lips into the crown of her hair, taking in the smell of sweetly blooming flowers and sweat which mixed wonderfully inside his nostrils.

He loved Astrid's fragrance. It was just so..._Astrid_.

"I should be flinging you over my shoulder and pinning you to the ground using my foot." Astrid uttered into his torso, equally taking in his scent.

"Yeah, but then I'd most likely be dead." He chuckled half-heartedly.

"Which is the reason I haven't done it yet."

He kissed her hair once more, his hands reaching up to cup her face and allow her to observe his serious expression.

"Let's face the facts, Hiccup. You'd be busted without me." She sighed into his lips, as he leaned down and slanted them across hers.

It was a slow, hesitant kiss, but nonetheless it ignited a burning, longing sensation within the pit of Hiccup's stomach, and he found himself pressing more vigorously against her.

She complied, her fingers now lacing into his hair and pulling at the small strands, tugging at his lips with her own until she felt him wince again, freezing momentarily.

"You okay?" she panted with fear, taking a step back and observing as one of his hands escaped her cheek and flew towards the side of his waist.

"All okay..." he breathed, grimacing, "I'll be all okay..."

Astrid sighed, shaking her head, "Come on, babe, let's get you home."

* * *

><p> AN: **Anyone else heard that they are postponing the release of HTTYD3 by another year? Yup, it's 2018 now. Dreamworks is having some financial problems and thus have decided to rearrange the way they release movies per year: one sequel and one new movie now, so Croods 2 will be '17 and HTTYD3 one year after that. How do you guys feel about it? I honestly think it's good; gives them more time to work on it and make it hopefully so epic that it'll write history._

Anywayz, I really hope you had a nice feely time reading this chapter - and sorry again for leaving you hanging on a cliffhanger for so long...hehe. I would be more than honoured and feel overly blessed if you wrote me a review with your feelings, or speculations, or both. What'll happen next chapter, then? Anyone wanna make a guess? Will the Bewilderbeast attack again, Eret and Astrid find something, or something strange and unforeseen happen, maybe? You speculate! I'd love to hear from you!

Thanks again my lovely riders! *flings dragon nip into the air and exits*

12. Chapter 12

_**A/N: **This was supposed to have been up yesterday, but when I look at the clock, time just flies. It was then supposed to have been up this morning. I'm a busy person, I really am! So here goes chapter 12, I hope you thoroughly enjoy! To all **"The Awakening"** readers, a chapter shall follow hopefully tomorrow! _

* * *

<p>Chapter 12

"There is an eighty-five percent chance that that's why he attacked."

Hiccup twisted the small mechanism in his hands, playing around with a coiled spring, tugging at a screw and readjusting a piece of elastic texture.

"Although it might be plausible to say that it's pretty much ninety-nine percent, considering that it's in his reptilian nature."

Without much concentration, he inspected the scratched metal with furrowed brows before twisting it in the palm of his hands again.

"Hiccup, are you even listening to what I'm telling you?" Fishlegs frowned equally, closing his Book of Dragons as he puffed out his chubby cheeks.

"Mhm." He twirled the tiny construction some more, emerald eyes scrutinizing a tattered piece of leather that had begun to dissolve around the edges.

"Then what did I just explain to you?" Slightly aggravated, Fishlegs slapped his hand down onto the table, hoping to grab his chief's attention that way. Yet his unwavering eyes were met with nonchalance.

"Mhm." Hiccup muttered, flipping the craftsmanship in a rather dejected manner before he scanned over it again.

"Chief, your suit's on fire."

The auburn-haired boy nodded, his brows creasing further.

"Dragon's are attacking." Cocking an eyebrow, he leaned his head down slightly, trying to catch his friend's attention. Yet Hiccup seemed imprisoned in another world.

Sighing as he rubbed the side of his face, Fishlegs squeezed his eyes shut. This was the second time he had attempted to discuss their current topic with him, only to be met with oblivion. He pondered about a suitable tactic to get the attention of his chief back towards the present world. He knew that, being the leader of their tribe and all, it was demanded of Hiccup to do a lot of tedious as well as strenuous labour. He never did have the luxury of some quietude or simple time for himself. And as much as Fishlegs knew he deserved nothing more than several minutes of silence, in which he could revel in the ignorance towards all problems he, in reality, currently had, the situation was much too pressing.

Right now, he needed his chief to concentrate. They were possibly facing a battle a lot grander than the previous one; which was saying something. The mere fractions of memories that sometimes haunted Fishlegs in his nightmares were enough to awaken him during the

darkest hours, sweating and crying out for Meatlug. Said dragon would, when occasion called for it, sleep next to her beloved master and wake upon the desperate call. Licking his toes in a reassuring manner, it was her way of telling the well-fed young man that everything was alright and that he need not worry. The world was at peace, so his slumber should be the same. And if not, well, Meatlug was there to battle any foe that dared approach.

The grand boy knew the simple sound of Meatlug's name was enough to arouse his attention immediately. No matter what he reminisced about, his little girl always had priority. Knowing this, and being as devious as he sometimes was, his expression brightened.

"Toothless!" Fishlegs called cheerily, observing his chief's face to see the on-coming reaction.

Yet to his dismay, Hiccup just nodded, as if they were still delving into a conversation. His eyes had still not left the small composition in his hands.

Toothless, however, was not so lost, for he bounded towards the Ingerson heir, merrily grinning with his pink maw and sniffing the man, believing him to have a treat of sorts (why else would he dare call upon the alpha, considering he was _not Hiccup?)_

Fishlegs frowned disappointedly, surprised his strong affection for the black reptile was not enough to rouse him from his pondering. He knew it did not lack between them in form of bondage; they were inseparable. Hel, sometimes Fishlegs thought the man could communicate mentally with his dragon no matter _where_ he currently was, and vice versa. It probably was even the case, in all honesty. He would be damned to admit it, but he _was_ quite envious of their unique friendship.

But Toothless was with Hiccup, and he was safe, so _obviously_, _Hiccup was not concerned.

Yet the dearth of presence of another, _specific_ personality did not quite go by unnoticed; admittedly, her rising, now missing, authority had begun to become self-evident to all of Berk.

"Astrid." The fisher's son now muttered, suddenly understanding some of Hiccup's woes.

And the moment that noun left his lips, the boy perked up, large verdant eyes scanning Fishleg's face near to hopefully.

"What?" He now queried. Briefly, he glanced around, entertaining the thought of said woman having returned safely. His heart fluttered within his ribcage all of a sudden.

Fishlegs sighed once more, knowing too well that his affection for the blonde Viking was very intense, and thus, it was no wonder he worried himself sick about her.

_When __will__ those two finally get married?_ The Ingerson had believed the proposal would have come much sooner. What was hindering Hiccup?

"I was talking about the Bewilderbeast." The larger man now

elaborated.

"Oh..." The evident disappointment did not surprise the Gronckle-rider in the slightest.

Despite not knowing what emotions of such depth meant, he somewhat understood the apprehension currently possessing his opposite at the thought of a colossal behemoth out there, somewhere, and his girlfriend very close to finding it, considering her amazing tracking skills (or rather, Stormfly's).

"It is common that when Bewilderbeasts fight, they do so until death in order to gain the position of the alpha, as we could see during the attack on the dragon sanctuary. Toothless did not kill the black Bewilderbeast, he just told him to get out of his territory. Which means, as soon as Toothless left his own territory, his power over the dragons faded. Like, he has to prove himself as the alpha to all outstanding dragons." Fishleg's eyes quickly flitted over towards Hiccup, seeing if the man was listening.

He was not sure if he indeed did.

"So...the Bewilderbeast pretty much has free reign outside of Toothless' territory, making him still a logical threat." Fishlegs gulped audibly, "And every dragon under Toothless' reign that leaves the territory, without him, could possibly be manipulated to obey the former alpha."

At that, the auburn-haired chief nodded gravely, placing his toy onto the table they sat at. The faint, mumbled chatter of fellow Vikings now greeted his ears as he realised where exactly he was, and why.

All this time, his mind was swirling around Astrid and her team, worried for the possible outcome of their investigation. The mechanism served as a form of distraction; as did any work that related to forgery.

"Well, then we should call back the scouting team and I should be the one out there, trying to find the Bewilderbeast." He spoke with new-found determination, "The village is as good as repaired, and I entrust the training of future riders fully to you, Fishlegs."

"Yes, indeed" Hiccup noted how pride now filled Fishleg's stance as he straightened himself a little, "just..." suddenly, his doubt returned, and he slumped back again, "I-I mean, the Bewilderbeast did not attack, you found him, right? And then attacked...so..."

"What are you trying to say, Fishlegs?" He did not intend for his voice to come out so stern and cold, but it had.

"Well...Maybe the Bewilderbeast is trying to build himself a new home, outside of the reign of Toothless and his dragons. Like a...second tribe? You know, there's us, the Hooligan tribe, and then there are other tribes, like the-"

"I get what you mean, Fishlegs. Maybe, but it'd be safer to go tame the Bewilderbeast. There is no point leaving him out there as long as people such as Drago exist. And besides, that very man bought him up;

teaching him fear and murder." The chief rubbed the slight stubble on his chin, frowning down at the scratched surface of the table, "I still believe it would be safer for me to search for that dragon, considering Toothless and all."

"But chief, your wounds have only just healed! What if something like that happened again?" Looking up at his larger counterpart, Hiccup saw the clear insecurity twinkle in his eyes.

Hiccup had been reckless, as he often liked to be, considering his, with Astrid's words, crazy nature. There was no guarantee he would not do it again; alone, without the aid of a suitable team.

"Don't worry about that. All I am saying is that in case the Bewilderbeast senses us approaching, which he most likely would, I would not have to fear Toothless falling under his influence again." He directed a hand towards the onyx reptile, who had been watching the two Vikings interact ever since Fishlegs had accidentally called him over, "Whilst there might be that risk with any other dragon. But as long as Toothless is there..."

He trailed off, believing the dragon-nerd to understand his implications as he poked the small construction on the table.

Somewhere in the distance, he noticed that the Great Hall doors were opened and hasty footsteps began to approach.

"But, you do agree that you going alone would not be safe enough?"

Sighing in defeat, Hiccup nodded, "Yes, I agree."

"Well, then you surely realise that I would be a suitable companion for this journey." He was eyeing his chief as he spoke.

Who scowled in response, "Fishlegs, you are needed at the academy to-"

"Let's face facts, Hiccup; Astrid is a much better teacher than I, considering all the practical flying and fighting on dragon-back. I'm more of a theoretician. And despite me fearing the outcome of this mission, considering we are searching for one of the most powerful dragons of all times, I think my knowledge would be of great use, accompanied by your wisdom, of course." His matter-of-fact approach towards the topic had, indeed, convinced Hiccup somewhere.

Fishlegs was being sensible and rational, and Hiccup appreciated that a lot.

"You're right, Fish-"

"Chief!"

The hurried footsteps that had been gaining in volume came to an abrupt halt behind Hiccup, who twisted in his seat to face none other than Eret.

A small squeeze clenched at his heart, and an even smaller fraction of delight upon the realisation, that, if Eret had returned, so had

Astrid. But the rather aghast expression on the rider's face unnerved him more than anything; something had gone wrong. _Terribly_ wrong.

"Why is it that, whenever we two talk nowadays, you convey me bad news?" Hiccup's voice was chilled and low as he sensed something foreboding.

"I'm sorry, chief...I wish it were different" he was evidently out of breath, sighing lengthily before continuing, "It's about Astrid."

The auburn-haired man cringed upon the sound of that name. _Why Astrid?_

"She...she's in danger. You need to hurry and help-" The muscular man could not finish his sentence, for already his chief had sprung to his feet, Toothless right behind him as they legged it out of the hall faster than a Night Fury could fly.

Fishlegs, who was equally as shocked, but still sat at his former position, now stood up. His large oculars bore into Eret's face, "What's with Astrid?" He questioned warily, fearing the response.

Surprised that Hiccup was gone before Eret could fully elaborate, the Rumblehorn-rider turned towards the other Viking, confusion, tiredness and fear all within his expression at once, "She...we found the Bewilderbeast, but his presence began to influence our dragons for the worse. We attempted to escape, and Astrid had the idea we split up to make it harder for him. I and the others got out of there, but I saw Astrid somewhere in the distance crashing into the forests. I could not get to her; Skullcrusher was behaving rather badly because of the Bewilderbeast. I just tried to put distance between us and get to Berk as quickly as possible. If anyone, Toothless can defy that dragon's power..."

Fishlegs saw something akin to shame as Eret shrugged his shoulders, eyebrows creased.

"We should go help them out." Nodding in approval, both Vikings left suit.

* * *

><p>She thought this would be the end of it all. And suddenly, realising that painstaking thought, she reminisced about the past.<p>

It was all just a flash; her growing up, learning how to fight. The day her mother gifted Astrid with her favourite axe â€" she had never felt more proud at the time. Training at the academy, and how her life changed when Hiccup tamed and befriended Toothless. Suddenly, _training at the academy_ no longer meant slaughtering winged reptiles but working_ with_ them. Her heart fluttered at the memory of all the beautiful hours spent on Stormfly's back, chasing the wind, or marauders, and challenging Hiccup and Toothless to races she knew she would never win.

_Hiccup..._she would never forget how they _came to be_. That fateful

night, when he had finally initiated their first proper kiss. How elated she was; it took all she had to not jump around like a Viking on fire, especially when she got back home and snuck into her room. Her gleeful expression the next day did not go unnoticed by her parents.

Within her mind she could draw out every little action, every little moment and every event she and Hiccup had experienced together, all which lead to their finally blooming relationship. Astrid's heart clenched when she thought of the day Hiccup had taught her how to ride on Toothless; working the mechanism of the prosthetic tail-fin so that it came naturally during flight. Her appreciation and respect towards the Night Fury had only grown since then.

Stormfly...it was ironic that she faced her demise at the hands, or rather claws, of her own dragon. Just like how Hiccup had faced Toothless, only that his father had intervened...

Once her Deadly Nadder awakened from her trance, would she be capable of feelings such as remorse and sorrow for the loss of her mistress? Would burning guilt plague her, and woes consume her the way it would with a fellow Viking? Maybe, considering all she and her teal dragon had gone through; all the battles and achievements.

What would her parents say when they found out? Her friends; probably even Snotlout would cry; a thought very amusing despite the current predicament she faced.

And Hiccup. Oh, Hiccup. Would he cry and thrash, scream and roar until his lungs went raw? Most likely; she loved him, after all.

Her insides were on fire at the realisation; she loved him. Had she ever told him? Truthfully, honestly, into his face? Simply grabbed his arms, steadied him and spoken those three, simplistic words? Because she did, and the gods knew how many times she had thought it privately, within the realm of her own conscience. Astrid would not deny it, but neither had she openly told Hiccup that, ever. But he had. Many times already.

Breathing became increasingly hard; not because of her death which knocked resiliently at her door, but because out of all she ever had to regret, it was not having told the man she desired like no other what she truthfully felt.

Hot tears pricked at her eyes, demanding to be released, for her to wail out loud. She would never cave in; it was not her style, not when it could be evaded. She hated crying, and only allowed herself so in the presence of Hiccup, albeit reluctantly. Because she knew he would catch her no matter where and when she fell.

Yet now, everything was too late; to make confessions, to hope for rescue, to believe in a future where, maybe, possibly, she would stand at the side of her lover for all eternity. Everything had already turned black in front of her.

It moved and worked, being accompanied by a sharp, high-pitched shriek and an explosion. The obsidian began to reflect various sources of light behind her, as minuscule as those were, and suddenly, Astrid had to frown.

Her conscience was not fading, she was not slipping into oblivion, and she still felt and smelt and heard everything clearly around her.

A squawk, undoubtedly Stormfly's, accompanied by a growl and a strong command.

Before she realised what had occurred, Stormfly's face nudged her side in an apologetic manner, rubbing against her with more force as the blonde did not react. Astrid jumped, then turned, patting the scaly head of her Deadly Nadder.

The mass of onyx in front of her shifted, and she came to realise that it was Toothless, large chartreuse eyes observing her carefully as if to ask: _"Are you okay?" _

"Astrid!" Lean, yet powerful arms wrapped themselves around her frame, holding her firmly to a leather-covered chest.

She smelt forest, and burnt wood as well as sea-salt, mixed with something unique, undefinable, yet oddly alluring. _Hiccup_.

When Astrid finally came back to her senses, she discovered that her hope for rescue had not been for naught; Hiccup had miraculously arrived on Toothless, having saved her from death. _How_ he had discovered her, or had even _known_ she needed him was beyond her. But never had she been more glad of his presence.

Immediately, as relief entered her system, she flung her arms around his neck, pulling him tightly against her body, feeling his warmth and inhaling his fragrance.

"Hiccup!" she squeaked, too relieved to feel embarrassed.

Said man pulled back slightly to look at her face; she did not know a more astounding hue of green than that of his eyes.

"I'm glad I made it in time." His smile caused her entire body to tingle pleasantly, soothing all her fears and pain away.

Stormfly cawed, most likely to gain the attention of her mistress, but Astrid only shuddered, shrinking into Hiccup's embrace.

"It's okay, she is no longer in trance. The Bewilderbeast cannot control her as long as Toothless is around." Her boyfriend reassured, his arms rubbing up and down her spine comfortingly, "Come on, let's get out of here."

Yet the moment the blonde warrior faced her beryl reptile, viewing those loving, amber orbs, a violent, iced shiver trailed down her back and her legs and feet went numb. All she could think of was the menacing glare with which Stormfly had stared at her mere minutes ago.

"I...I can't." She suddenly admitted sorrowfully, stepping back from her wonderful companion.

"Astrid...it's okay." He reached out, not quite touching her.

"I just..." The woman turned, squeezing her eyes shut. He could detect her tremble; her skin had paled drastically, her lips bleached and her eyes had long lost their soft, endearing glow.

An abrupt roar rocked through the forest, and several cries of dragons followed. Hiccup glanced towards the empyrean, knowing what was to come.

"We need to leave. Get on Toothless." Without much resistance, Hiccup managed to pull Astrid after him towards the Night Fury and they both hopped on. The only thing he discerned before Toothless darted into the sky was Astrid's arms wrapped desperately around him, and the feel of her head against his back. Then, it was replaced by bashing winds and pricking cold, and the constant calls of aggravated dragons.

They tumbled through the welkin, Toothless swinging his wings vehemently as they glided across at an unmeasurable pace, escaping danger before it could arrive. Stormfly fluttered after them, doing her best to keep up. They manoeuvred through clouds, cutting into gusts and dived towards the oceans, the route all too familiar to Astrid. Berk was not far, and there was Dragon Island on their path back. The reptiles there were under Toothless' command...

Another roar shook the earth and caused vibrations to bounce off every existent surface. A flock of dragons swarmed towards them. Toothless cried out, pupils forming threatening slits.

"We cannot fight them like this, bud! Get us out of here!" Adhering to his rider with an agreeing rumble, he tilted his body forward, Hiccup understanding that as the signal to change the position of the pedal. Suddenly, they gained in velocity, causing Astrid's eyes to water and her vision to blur. Everything began to spin and tumble and nothing made as much sense as it usually did.

"Toothless!" She heard the chief call before the evident explosion of a plasma blast followed. A few dragons squawked as they were hit. Stormfly growled too, magnesium fire intoxicating the air and the all too familiar slicing sound of spikes that penetrated through the sky.

Daring to open her eyes and chance a glance behind her, she noted the massively increasing swarm of aggressive dragons that pursued them, being thrown back only by the occasional attacks from either Stormfly or Toothless. The latter twisted and fired back the moment those enemies decreased the distance between them too much, causing a curt swing of Astrid's body. Yet she did not feel endangered.

"If we fly faster, we'll lose Stormfly!" Hiccup ground his teeth as he tried to come up with something cunning to catapult them out of their predicament.

He manoeuvred the onyx reptile to do a tumble-roll, swerving above the ocean before he swung through some stone obstacles, "There are no caves or hiding-places close enough, either..." Astrid did not indulge in his loud contemplating. She was far too disturbed. No coherent word wanted to leave her lips. No word _at all_, to be precise, which highly confused her.

Why was her voice lacking? What was _wrong_ with her? Her boyfriend

and their dragons needed her right now; to get them out of this sticky situation, safe and sound. Yet all she contributed was silence. Not the greatest of aids. Not when she usually aligned her thoughts with those of Hiccup, together forming something crazy, yet effective to save both of their behinds. Not this time, it seemed. All willpower suddenly left her, and Astrid felt the gravity of everything tug at her shoulders mercilessly. She was so tired...

"Astrid-!" She was not sure what Hiccup would have asked had he been able to complete his sentence, yet something happened, just as she, mere seconds ago, prayed would.

A loud, sonic boom coursed through the sky, all dragons twisting their bodies painfully. Many others were blasted from the heavens, tumbling motionlessly into the tossing waves.

Both riders were agape, glancing behind them to see what on earth had caused this obstruction.

And the sight that met their eyes was truly other-worldly.

A huge, shadow-casting silhouette that roared so loud, it nearly challenged the call of the Bewilderbeast. All dragons fled, flapping their way back towards their actual territory.

Once light found a way onto their massive saviour, Hiccup and Astrid recognized smooth, indigo skin and hundreds of white dots.

"A Thunderdrum..." Hiccup breathed in astonishment, Toothless hovering on the spot next to his Deadly Nadder companion as they watched the tidal dragon twist and face them. "Not any Thunderdrum" Hiccup now continued, eyes widening even more, if that was at all possible, "Thornado."

* * *

><p>AN: **I hope Astrid di__d not seem OOC...I just tried to think how she might react to such an incidence, and a short shock seemed fitting. Now, what do you think will happen now? How will Astrid and Hiccup react to Thornado's return, will they make it or...well, will something else happen and someone else appear. Or something else. You tell me in a review! Please be so kind and leave a word or two to show me you are reading this! It means the world to me, honestly!_ **>

13. Chapter 13

**A/N: **First off; sorry for any mistakes or weirdness you will most likely find in this chapter. I am SO tired, and it WON'T GO AWAY! Ever since I'm at my aunt's&uncle's house, my eyes are all droopy and that. Maybe it's the terrible weather? Who knows - drunk some black tea already, but it's not helping...University starts soon. How am I gonna survive lectures?_

Secondly, a big thanks to _multyfangirl117_ for actually reviewing **EVERY** chapter to this story. I was delighted with every review; I know I do not always respond. I am a timid author, to be honest. I

often do not know what to say, but do know that I appreciate every single word and they all serve as motivation and inspiration to keep me going. I feel guilty when I'm not writing despite receiving such wonderful response. So I hope you all feel inspired too and leave behind a word or two after this chapter!_

_Thirdly: some really good news. I got myself a huge HTTYD2 poster at a decoration store the other day. I just moved, and my walls are all glaringly white. I hung it up and quite immediately felt more at home. My writing-urge also kicked in after that. And also: any fandom article I am allowed to possess makes me feel blessed. Hurray! So more of good news for me...ya...

>

Thank you again, and sorry for the mistakes. I am so knackered...

_**P.S.:** I know I mentioned this in a PM, but happy belated birthday **Blu100-Jewell100** ;)

>

* * *

><p>Chapter 13

All the dragons hesitated with glowering orbs and fire-tinged maws. Thornado flapped with lackadaisical wings in front of the gathering crowd of hostile reptiles as these contemplated what they could undertake to thwart Hiccup and his team's further escape.

"I...I can't believe it-!" Hiccup's eyes widened as his pupils dilated.

Seeing the azure reptile here, with him, all merry and with radiating, silent power had something so warming and enlightening. He felt his chest tingle, heating up like a growing furnace.

"Thornado..." It was the first word Astrid had uttered since gods-know-when. She was just as stunned as her boyfriend, clinging onto his leather suit as she tried to peak over his broad shoulder.

Another wind-splitting roar_, _echoing menacingly off cliffs and rocks and the ocean's surface. Said dragon dove for the attack, sonic booms flickering through the air as more winged reptiles were smacked by invisible fire and crashed unceremoniously towards the churning sea.

"How did he...where does he..." All the confusion stayed the way it was; irritating, as Toothless and Stormfly begun to charge forwards again, increasing distance between themselves and their foes, "W-Wait! We need to help Thornado!" Hiccup leant down to grab his Night Fury's attention, yet the obsidian beast grunted and ignored his request.

"Use your sword's hilt." Astrid suddenly spluttered, eyes forming concentrated orbs of blue, "The Hideous Zippleback gas." She elaborated, and without further explanation Hiccup already understood what she intended.

He grasped into his satchel, finding the desired object and fumbled with fiddling fingers for the mechanism which would release the obscene gas. It took him much too long for his nervous conscience, even though whipping winds were serving as an obstruction, as finally, green miasma streamed out in a billowing cloud. Yet before it could fully spread, the dragon-rider flung it full force behind them towards their enemies.

The malachite substance curled all around them, building an opaque barrier. But that was not his whole intention. Of course the reptiles were now irritated, even though Thornado burst through the thickening vapour with ease. The moment the chief saw his father's former dragon approach, he called out to Toothless. Said being arched his body artistically in mid-air, allowing him to bend his head and shoot a well-aimed plasma shot at the fumes which instantly ignited itself, exploding with thundering resonance.

They heard roars and growls as well as desperate cries, and Hiccup would be a terrible liar if he said it did not affect him at least a slight bit. These scaled animals were not at fault for their wrong-doings; they were being controlled by a dragon, who, himself, had only ever known suffering and angst. None of them could be blamed. In all honesty, not even Drago could. They were all simply victims of Time and Fate and Circumstance. It was a horrendous cycle of everlasting misunderstanding and pain which caused every living creature to respond with hostility towards the next; and maybe it was also a lack of will and determination to fight against the hopelessness.

The auburn-haired man knew all too well what that felt like. If it were not for the woman sitting behind him, he would have faltered too many times; too long ago. That was a fact. Even Toothless knew.

Silence ensued as the two riders and three dragons continued their journey across the firmament; gusting breezes and thin veils of moisture were all that greeted them as the waves crashed with nonchalance many feet underneath.

"I think we lost them." Hiccup spoke after many mute minutes.

Astrid nodded, despite her knowing that he could not see said action. Simultaneously, the riders redirected their gaze towards their indigo saviour.

Thornado flew with a calmness and ease that was breathtaking; he seemed unsurprised to have found them both here in this terrible predicament, and came to save them as if it were his daily mead.

"Where did you come from, boy?" Hiccup had a tiny laugh in his voice; simply because he was so elated to see this fellow again after so many years. He remembered how it had taken his father several winters before he had found himself a dragon as equally stubborn, proud and powerful as Thornado; and one he loved just as much. They often went back to Dragon Island, hoping to find any indication of the tidal dragons, yet were always left with no sign.

Hiccup and Fishlegs concluded that, out of safety reasons, Thornado

had taken Bing, Bang and Boom with him into other territory; after all, there were only so many enemies you could battle and win against without any consequences to follow. It had simply not been safe enough for the Thunderdrums; with or without a fully grown tidal reptile as their personal guardian and foster parent.

It was a shame, and a terrible ache in the heart, but it was necessary. Hiccup knew, so did his father, and despite him acting all indifferent and understanding, his son understood that deeper pain dwelt; hidden from the open eye, for a chief had to be strong and represent said strength to keep his people together.

The new chief sighed. He could only pray to every existent god that he would find the same vigour as his father.

Seeing Thornado here with them now brought back painful, stabbing memories, but also a new sense of glee and relief; something from the past that was not but a memory.

"Let's take you home my friend." Hiccup announced with a near to melancholic smile, his girlfriend still as mute as before behind him.

Just as he manoeuvred Toothless to fly back to Berk, both other dragons ready to follow, another caw ricocheted across the sky and suddenly, they saw a new swarm of ferocious reptiles at their tails.

"Are you kidding me?" The third or fourth time Astrid piped up, pure appal within her tone of voice.

"I thought we lost them." Hiccup muttered in disbelief, Toothless growling underneath them in defiance.

"They are persistent on getting us; they must be really angry." Astrid frowned, Thornado seeming as annoyed as they all were as he grumbled lowly.

"It's all Drago's doing." Hiccup ground out and the hostility within his voice was not to be missed. Despite knowing that the horrible man himself was sort of a martyr, and that his situation could not be helped, the young boy was incapable of suppressing the gradually rising rage. His whole body tensed up and his own, personal anger began to consume him until a placating hand found rest near the area of his heart.

Despite thick layers of leather and cloth, Hiccup felt warmth seep through, the effects being immediate. He relaxed, all tautness loosening up.

"Don't, Hiccup" Astrid whispered in a soothing way, "Don't let revenge control you." All of a sudden, before he could actually fully realise it occurred, Astrid's warm presence behind him disappeared.

Hiccup quickly glanced over his shoulder, finding Astrid to have stood up and now balancing along Toothless' back.

"What're you doing!?" he hoped his voice did not squeak too much as he was nervous all of a sudden.

"We need to outdistance them! If we stick together it'll be harder. If we split up, we should be able to mislead them and get back home safely." Before he could protest or generally throw in a comment full of concern, Astrid jolted.

She was gone as speedily below the clouds as she reascended on Stormfly. Said dragon squawked merrily, glad to have her beloved rider back.

"Astrid, that's dangerous! If the Bewilderbeast gets to you whilst Toothless is not around-"

"I know! But he won't!" She winked at him as she flew close to his dragon, "I'm sorry, I was scared earlier. So scared that it allowed for me to doubt the strength of Stormfly's bond with me. That was naïve. But I'm okay now." She ignored the fact that Hiccup seemed puzzled by her confession, simply smiling and shaking her head lightly, "We'll fly back to Berk on different routes. You tell Thornado. I'll see you there."

Astrid's stare lingered for a moment; yet before she could glide away and implement her plan, Hiccup's hand clamped around her forearm and held on tightly. His facial expression was one filled with apprehension and worry.

"Astrid..."

"Hiccup, it'll be-"

"I cannot lose you too." The words resonated through her head and for a curt moment, Astrid forgot everything around her. The cries of dragons, the sound of gas forming and sparks being ignited. She could not even recognize the cacophony of batting wings and curling waves down below.

Looking at Hiccup, she saw him bare in every way possible. Suddenly, the enigmatic boy from their younger days was gone – there was only Hiccup now. A man so different from back then, but no less spectacular, and every bit the person she loved from the bottom of her heart.

"You won't ever-" Her words were then interrupted by something that flabbergasted both riders even more than the unforeseen appearance of Thornado.

It was something they could only start to analyse and consider in hindsight, back home, on Berk, when their thoughts began to gather, for now it was just a rapid sequence of events that all occurred and passed too quickly. Before they knew it, an explosion happened, the dragons clamoured in fear, the masses dispersed and their own winged reptiles were rapidly approaching Berk, about to land on the safe territory that was their home.

Something happened that, in all their lives, both of them had always hoped to see one day; to experience, but never truthfully believed it to be actually possible. It was something out of a dream – desired with every fibre of one's being, but never honestly could it actually occur, because the hope had already been lost too long ago.

A shadow passed amongst the sky, like a dark lightning-bolt darting across, accompanied by a high-pitched roar which shook the firmament. Violet curls of fuming fire exploded and shattered the enemy's defence. Five further blasts followed. It appeared only as a flicker in the dimming light, like a flash, and was gone before it even arrived.

When Astrid and Hiccup finally landed on Berk, breathing deeply as Thornado came to a gradual halt behind them in the village's centre, they simply glanced at one another with eyes full of mystery.

"Was that what I think it was?" Astrid muttered, her oculars flitting over to Toothless. Said dragon was as befuddled as the next person.

"It must've been" Hiccup swallowed, rubbing his forehead as he felt the throb of a headache approach, "a...a-"

"Night Fury."

* * *

><p>"So, when's the baby due?" Tuffnut slitted his eyes critically, twisting his head in every angle possible as he observed Astrid who sat cross-legged on top of her cot.<p>

They were currently at her house, where Gothi had come by to check out all of her injuries. Shortly before she had nearly been attacked by her own Deadly Nadder, Astrid had fought some solemn dragons and earned herself a few minor burns here and there. Her moves had been hectic and uncoordinated; too many years having passed since her last proper dragon-fighting training. She was so used to cooperating with Stormfly and, often enough, Hiccup, that she nearly forgot what battling without succour was like "as had once been her goal" the one she had owned as a young girl who knew nothing of the true nature dragons possessed.

Tuffnut suddenly came closer, peeking intriguingly at her stomach, "Can you feel it yet? Is it a Viking, or more of a Hiccup?"

"What!?" Astrid's azure eyes were wide with shock, her brows furrowed drastically, "What the hell are you talking about!?"

"Can I hold it when it's out?" Blond dreadlocks jumbled around as the male Thorston's face lit up excitedly.

"Tuffnut, what are you on about?" Her fingers came to caress her forehead, which felt hot and rough. Bandages had already been wrapped around her left forearm and right wrist as well as ankle. A short bandage was near the left side of her waist, where the harsh bark of a misshapen tree had struck her during her escape. She was sure some of her blood was still clinging to the hostile twig-ends.

"Seriously, Astrid" Ruffnut now stepped forward, her visage being as serious as Astrid had ever seen it, which was rarely the case, "of all the girls our age to get pregnant, I would have never thought that you would be the first." She shook her head, as if

disappointed and partially ashamed of what she had discovered.

Astrid felt her head throb all of a sudden. She tried not to grind her teeth too hard as she sat a little straighter, rolling her eyes, "Ruffnut, we are the only girls our age." No point in lashing out now; they were the twins, after all. What logic could one expect from them?

Suddenly, Ruffnut's face brightened with understanding, "Oh, really? Well then it's plausible!"

A heavy sigh escaped the Hofferson's chapped lips, a shake of her own head following subsequently, "Guys, I'm not pregnant!"

"You sure?" Tuffnut was still standing pretty close to Astrid's form on the bed, eyeing her as if she were a new, exotic dragon-species they had just discovered, "You look a little fatter around the hi-"

Before he could complete his phrase, Astrid had balled her fist tightly, summing up enough energy to punch him in the face and cause him to tumble backwards in pain and surprise. She then averted her angered orbs towards his female counterpart, glaring deathly daggers as she challenged her to word another insult, thus risking to end just like her brother, who was currently on the floor, holding his cheek miserably whilst yelping.

Yet Ruffnut just stepped back, blinking like an innocent young lamb, "Hey, he said that" her finger pointed at the lamenting Tuffnut, "not me. We honestly thought the Chief had you up the duff. I thought that was why Gothi came by earlier."

Astrid hid her face behind her hand, the blooming scarlet hue spreading on her cheeks as she tried to swallow all embarrassment back. What genuine idiots these two proved to be. Everyone knew that the practice of coitus before marriage was looked upon with opprobrium and dishonour; the citizens of Berk would shun her, her father most likely disown her. Even though many things had changed, and traditions had been bent and twisted over the past half of a decade, weddings and matrimonies were still executed with high precision; these ceremonies were still held in high regard, after all.

Of course, what happened behind closed doors where no one could see it was completely up to those who were behind said doors. If they desired to give in to the nightly throes of passion, then so be it, as long as it was kept secret. It was, after all, an act neither young couples nor lustful youngsters should find themselves caught in, lest the female counterparts wanted to be damned as the village harlot and live a life of shame.

Obviously Astrid and Hiccup had not indulged in such acts; not even secretly. Granted, the desire was there; buried deeply underneath all formalities and decorum. She could not deny the fact that she had looked at Hiccup in ways different to those of simply kissing, hand-holding lovers. Neither could she deny her inner wish, sometimes, during their moments of solitude, for Hiccup to start touching her in places rather inappropriate. There was a part of her that wanted more of him "a fraction of her heart that yearned

for something else that only he could give her.

She knew, from the gossip female Berkians provided and the chatter her mother sometimes offered, that men were more easily seduced as well as more likely to surrender themselves to their waging hormones; quickly could they find themselves in a bedroom, or some shed or other location with a woman they wanted in no other way but physically. Astrid had often been told that men, in that aspect, were more simple-minded and less in control of their bodily desires.

The blonde always did ask herself if Hiccup, being, well, Hiccup, counted too. If he did not stand above such carnal needs, or if he was just as much a victim as any other Viking man on Berk, or generally, in the entire world. She could honestly not tell if he wanted her in any physical way. They had shared some deeper, more passionate kisses before, and there had been a heat then both of them were not capable of interpreting with certainty. Astrid could only guess that, if truthfully Hiccup craved to take their relationship onto a more intimate level, he was fighting the urge back out of grandeur and respect. For him, not much damage would be done to his name if he devoted himself to sexual activities and got caught. For Astrid, it could destroy everything she was, and she knew that. He knew that too, being the cleverest Berkian for a reason. The Nadder-rider could not help but marvel at Hiccup's reverential attitude. There sincerely was no one else like him out there, and she felt herself blessed that very moment.

A moan and a whelp told her Tuffnut had found his way back onto his feet with staggering balance, holding his head as if it had suddenly gained tremendous weight, "Why else are we here, then?" he now threw in with a confused frown.

"Maybe because I ran into the Bewilderbeast and nearly got killed by some wild dragons, amongst them having been my own!?" She held up her bandaged appendages, yet that did not seem to impress the Thorston boy.

"Wow, that sucks." Ruffnut replied unenthusiastically, shrugging.

"Don't see why we have to stay then if there's no baby involved." Tuffnut added, shrugging himself as the twins turned towards the door that led downstairs.

Just as they made their way to the exit, the loud resonance of thumping feet echoed up the stairs and before they knew it, Hiccup stood in front of them.

As he trudged his way up, his voice already boomed with worry, "Hey Astrid, how're you-" he halted with his question, now eyeing the two other blonde's in his girlfriend's bedroom, "Ruff? Tuff? What're you guys doing here?" He had a questioning brow raised by now.

"I'm disappointed, chief!" Tuffnut crossed his arms in front of his chest, jerking his head.

This only increased the confusion displayed in Hiccup's mimic. He obviously did not understand what they were on about; not much of a surprise, as they never really made any sense.

"You need to work on your impregnating skills!" He pointed a disapproving finger at his auburn-haired opposite, before he briefly peeked over his shoulder, "Let's go sis."

And as quickly as Hiccup had arrived, the Thorston twins disappeared, the door banging shut downstairs.

"_What the hell!?" Crimson in the face himself, Hiccup glanced carefully over at Astrid to see what exactly he had _missed_, but his girlfriend was busy hiding her own embarrassment.

"Twinsanity, what else." She elaborated with a shy smile.

A somewhat nervous laugh escaped Hiccup's lips as he carefully stepped inside her room until he stood right in front of her.

"Are you okay?" There was more to the question than just the on-the-surface-are-you-alright that any onlooker would have interpreted into it.

Thankfully, Astrid could detect the underlying tone, the several inquiries pact into three simple words spoken everyday by hundreds of men and women alike.

"I'm alright." She responded, hoping Hiccup could hear the sincerity with which she spoke.

Thankfully, he did, daring to seat himself beside her as his hands stemmed against the edge of the bed, "Fishlegs and Eret just returned; they had been on their way to help us out, but seemingly got lost. They're both sorting out the dragons right now..." He paused as she nodded, pressing his lips together briefly before he piped up again, "Quite a bit of an insurgency back there, ey?"

Astrid laughed dryly at that, snorting afterwards as she crept forward to stretch her legs beside those of her boyfriend, "The understatement of the year."

Both parties had a particular matter weighing heavily on their equivalent minds, but neither seemed capable of finding the courage to speak about it. It was strange; during any other day, at any other time, when the situation would be entirely different and normal, like mapping the world together was, Hiccup would have assaulted Astrid with the news that now plagued his conscience. They would have talked about it for hours, left Berk near to immediately and would most likely have been gone for days to weeks trying to find the very being they so sought.

What was tying their tongues right now? Did it seem so off-charts to be true? To be real? Maybe it was the possibility of just being an illusion; a trick of the mind in the heat of a fight they seemed to be losing. Everything was unreal "€" starting from the moment Thornado had suddenly appeared to save them.

As if having read his thoughts, Astrid piped up, "How's Thornado?"

Hiccup briefly glanced at her from the side, "Oh he's fine, Gobber is tending to him. He was all merry to see the oversized reptile back. Fishlegs is checking him out too, he was well excited. Mom's really

astounded by Thornado; was not surprised when I told her he used to be dad's dragon though. She said that's fitting, was kind of touched by it too, in a weird way." There was a curt and soft laugh following his words.

The girl chuckled along delicately, "I guess _all_ of Berk is a bit surprised and happy to find him having returned."

"Yeah, I guess..."

"So..."

"So..." He bit his lower lip, brows furrowing in concentration as he attempted to formulate the right words in his head before he spoke them; why was it so _hard? _He was confused; terribly irritated. As if he were about to _propose_, which, in fact, he was, but not _now, "_You know, when we-

"Is there a meeting?" The blonde interrupted, not allowing their eyes to meet for some strange reason.

"You mean, in the Great Hall?"

"Yes."

"Yeah, later this afternoon. I owe our people an explanation. We have to go defence."

"_Our _people?" Now he felt her eyes burn into the side of his skull; causing his cheeks to bloom a fiery red. He had said the _our_ reflexively; to be honest, it just felt and sounded right on his tongue and lips. And he wanted it to be that way, in the near future.

"You know, we're both Berkians..." Hiccup tried to elaborate, the details of carved wood on the floor planks as intriguing as ever.

"Hiccup..." just then, a squeaking and groaning of wood echoed throughout the hut as one large, obsidian reptile made his way upstairs and into Astrid's room.

Toothless nearly did not fit through the door, despite it being a wider than usual entrance, but still managed to slither his way in and warble softly at the two Vikings on the bed. He was evidently as equally worried about the blonde as Hiccup was, and required to know if everything was okay.

Hiccup immediately smiled at the sight of his best friend, whilst Astrid felt the heaviness of the earlier events weighing strongly on her mind " she had been about to cut into that conversation. Toothless appearing randomly in her house was all the more motivation and reminder to finally discuss _what _exactly had saved them out there.

"I let him in when I came to check on you. Hope you don't mind."

She shook her head quite immediately, "No no." then, after taking in a deep, silent breath, "About earlier, before we landed on Berk..."

"It was a Night Fury, I know." He blurted rapidly, confused that those words popped out like a plasma shot. A sudden awkwardness overcame him.

Astrid frowned, facing Hiccup now, who still observed the floor of her room with exaggerated interest, "We don't know for sure. It happened so quickly. I mean...it definitely looked like a Night Fury, but it wouldn't make any sense."

"It was a Night Fury; and not the one I rode on." New determination filtered into his conscience as all the thoughts he had had since earlier accumulated and prodded his tongue, wanting to be released. Hiccup peeked up at Toothless again, who had decided to lay down in front of the couple to listen into their conversation.

"I know...I know, just...why now? It seems a bit strange that all of a sudden, so close to Berk, a Night Fury appears and just...helps us out."

It was Hiccup's turn to scowl, "Why would it seem so off? Maybe he only now...arrived at this area of the world...maybe, he was escaping, or searching, or-"

"Hiccup, when Drago controlled the Alpha to manipulate Toothless, he was helpless against his power. It was only due to his unbreakable bond with you that he managed to free himself from those invisible chains. But a random Night Fury..."

"We don't know. Maybe...maybe he belongs to someone. Maybe..there are other riders out there or something; the world is so big, and we are only a tiny part of it." His words sounded sombre, despite this having been one of his biggest wishes since he had tamed Toothless; finding another Night Fury.

All the feelings of frustration and curiosity as well as all the questions that have been plaguing his mind since the day he decided he had to slay such a black reptile in order to gain acknowledgement were brewing to a storm within him.

He knew nothing about his onyx companion; where he came from, his usual habitation, what Night Fury eggs looked like or how they breed and hatched. He had never seen a hatchling before, Toothless had been fully grown when Hiccup found him.

"Even if we go out there now to find that dragon; we would possibly be searching forever. We don't know where he came from, or where he went to, or how to track him down. Hiccup..." Her hand came into contact with his arm; she knew what he wanted, she knew that he was adamant about jumping onto Toothless' back to track that dragon down, but she also knew that things were not the same as they used to be.

He was no longer a carefree child, allowed to do whatever pleased his mind and desire. He could not simply disappear from Berk's radar for countless hours, sky-diving and scouting new places, Toothless underneath him and Astrid at his side. Had any of this happened before the whole Drago incidence, Astrid would have most likely immediately sallied forth with Hiccup, being as nonchalant as ever.

But these times were long gone; Hiccup was chief now " the leader of a tribe that needed his presence and authority in order to exist. He had responsibility, a possible war to face, decisions to make; he had to protect his own.

And Astrid...they were both adults. He was her chief as much as anyone else's. She followed his orders and helped preserve and strengthen Berk. Gone were the days of joking about and messing in the training academy. The blonde had to admit she missed them; although she was also excited for what was to come.

"I know I can't just...go out there and search for him. I want to, I really do; I know Toothless does too."

Said dragon's ear-nubs sank as his dilated pupils focused on the two humans.

"We don't know for sure if it really was a Night Fury." Astrid threw in.

"It was, it definitely was."

"You cannot know for-"

"It was." He was so adamant with his answer that Astrid clamped her mouth shut, allowing for silence to settle between them for longer than both liked.

She did not desire tension to build up, but right then, that happened. The subject was delicate " more so than it ever had been. With all the problems they faced, it just did not fit in; simply weighed on the mind when they had other things to occupy themselves with. She could feel Hiccup's distress, for he was facing too many dilemmas at once. What to do first and last, he probably did not know.

"I am not the chief I'm supposed to be." He muttered softly, his head lowered, eyes focusing on his lap, "I...if dad were-"

"Hiccup, stop." Her voice was firm and strict and left her lips in a way she did not know herself was possible. She had never used such a tone before, but she continued, "You are ridiculous." Gradually, the female Viking lowered her own head, trying to catch her boyfriend's eyes with meaningful intentions, "You cannot expect to excel right from the start. Every chief makes mistakes and needs to learn " every leader grows with his successes and failures. We managed to survive this attack, we know the Bewilderbeast has gone out of control, that he has wild dragons outside of Berk's territory that are waiting to challenge you and Toothless. Both of you" and she glanced over at the Night Fury who currently observed her with great interest, "are chiefs now. Both of you have to grow into that role, and I wouldn't know anyone else more suitable. You are stronger than you think you are." Delicately, her fingers came to rest underneath his chin, tenderly lifting it so that his emerald orbs met hers, "I believe in you." A smile graced her lips; a gesture he immediately felt compelled to return.

"Thank you, Astrid."

She grinned, "You don't need to thank-"

"I do" he interrupted in mid-speech, "you do more for me than anyone else. You...are the courage I need when it's missing most. The voice that reminds me to not give up. You...remind me of who I am, and who I want to be."

Without warning, her heart began to hammer more rhythmically within her ribcage, becoming louder and more prominent " it thrummed in her throat, her head, her hands began to vibrate with the palpitation. The new sensation slightly frightened her as her large indigo eyes kept hold of his, inspecting them for any deeper implications. Sure they complimented each other from time to time; most occasions had a hint of sarcasm interlaced into them, but this was different.

This felt like a confession. She was both excited and terrified of the outcome.

His hand slid over hers, grasping it tightly, "After...the meeting. Come with me." There was something serious within his oculars; something of utmost importance he needed to talk about, and it had nothing to do with the Night Fury from earlier. It was as if he had made up his mind and now wanted her to partake in it. But what exactly that could be, she did not know.

"Come with you...?" The words left her lips before she knew they had. Her brain was racing, her thoughts a jumbled up mess of nonsense.

"Well, I want you to be there during the meeting, of course. But afterwards I want to show you something. Something nice." What was hidden behind the glimmering, viridian and slightly azure hue of his irises? What was he implying?

"At night?" She hoped she did not sound _too_ critical.

"At night is best."

"And Berk?"

"Don't worry about Berk." He grinned his typical, goofish way, making her feel jittery and content all the same.

After several seconds of silence, she finally responded with an "okay" and a meek nod.

* * *

><p>AN: **So many of you have been asking for this: another Night Fury. I was planning on one, obviously. There are hints in HTTYD2 that there will be more Night Furies/more about the Night Fury in movie 3. I am quite excited as well as...fearful. Well, what do you guys think? Will there be another Night Fury in movie 3? Another surprise here is what Hiccup is planning. What does he want to show Astrid, and how might she react? Any of you want to review and tell me what you think? Theories, feelings, wishes? I'd gladly hear you out!
>

Oh and, for some ****actual**** good news: Dragons season 3 is coming out VERY soon! And Hiccup is in his sexy Dawn of the Dragon Racers design...*drools*

So yeah, see you in the next update, soon, hopefully...

*spreads some Easter happiness with dragon egg hunts! Happy Easter!*

14. Chapter 14

**A/N:** Sorryyyy! I know! I know! This is like, super late, but I honestly had absolutely no time. I actually don't have time right now, but I felt guilty and also sick and tired of all my university work, so I thought - why not?

So here you go, and I hope you will thoroughly enjoy this scene which I wrote with a lot of care, for it is one you all have waited for since quite a while now! It was fun to write, but was also edited a lot, so yeah...Enjoy nonetheless!

* * *

><p>Chapter 14</p></p>

It was warm and still that night.

Astrid had believed it would cool down, maybe even freeze slightly during the darkest hours and for the winds to batter against them as they soared over the illuminating ocean.

Somehow, there was a burn within her chest; her heart no longer simply palpitated as if it were the frantically flapping wings of a Gronckle, but it felt warm, near to hot. Or maybe it was her stomach which kept somersaulting. She was definitely nervous. But why, she could not quite figure out. Something in the way Hiccup spoke, in which he had taken her hand with purpose after the meeting was done and guided her towards their destination was different than usual. Very much so. It felt as if her body had a premonition of what was to come, yet her brain would take forever to follow after.

The sensations drove her crazy.

Stormfly was flapping with ease, gliding inaudibly as she followed Toothless' tail. It seemed as if they were headed for _Frigga's Hearth_, which had the young Hofferson even more confused than she already was.

There was nothing too spectacular about that island. A few common, wild dragons, a nice, close-cropped forest, a small stream. It was sunny during such sun-filled days, and cold when the grand burning sphere was missing. The distance between here and Berk was not very far but the atmosphere was serene and safe. A perfect little island to hide a few hours from reality and relax. Astrid understood why Hiccup liked to seek out _Frigga's_ _Hearth_ from time to time, just what he desired to accomplish _tonight_ with Astrid was, however, beyond her.

And yet again the incidence from earlier, wherein the twins had

questioned her about the apparent pregnancy, came flashing through her mind. The talks she had heard other female Berkians have; about men taking women to secret locations in order to give in to lustful, passionate nights of sin.

Astrid's face began to burn like a raging furnace, most likely a crimson shade by now, as the possibility of what exactly Hiccup wanted dawned upon her. Here she was, believing he wanted to present to her a new dragon breed, or possibly show her a beautiful new location he had discovered. All her internal questions about if Hiccup was a man of honour, respect, or just as much a victim to manly hormones, were beginning to challenge each other vehemently.

Did he intend to...? Would she...? And they...?

He was the chief. Could he, with this new position, allow himself such an act? Would it not reflect badly onto his reputation? They had never spoken about more intimate levels of interaction; not with words. Had he somehow read the signs wrong? Or had she sent out the wrong signals?

Her mind was reeling, a throb bumping at the back of her skull when, without a warning, Toothless stooped lowly.

Before she could give in to the devastating thoughts that were about to convince her to turn around and bunk off as rapidly as she could, until she had gathered herself and calmed her heart, which, at this rate, was bound to burst through her chest, Hiccup's voice filtered into her mind.

"Careful here, there are wind streams that will knock you off Stormfly if you're not careful. Fly closely behind me."

Too late. It felt like it was too late. Astrid followed as Toothless took some rather peculiar turns around invisible barriers, making him appear as if Hiccup had 'lost control' over his dragon. He was swirling and looking a little ridiculous, but he was Hiccup and knew what he was doing. And she trusted him.

By the gods, she trusted him with all she had.

So Stormfly mimicked his actions, wheezing around in mid-air as if a forest of stone-slabs were blocking their pathway. At one point, her Deadly Nadder swung a little too far left, a hefty current dashing against her wing and bringing both rider and dragon out of balance for several seconds.

"I told you to be careful." Hiccup spoke with a laugh, upon which Astrid nervously smiled, afterwards slapping her face.

As if he could see her smile.

The giddiness within her body would not cease, but she decided that, whatever it was that would happen this night; he was Hiccup.

He was Hiccup; the man she loved with too much strength to be able to stand in a world where he no longer existed. Whatever he proposed tonight, they would be fine. If she declined, he would understand. Maybe, even, he had completely different intentions to what she

speculated, and nothing was half as bad as she believed.

'_Stop over-thinking everything, Hofferson. He is just trying to be romantic â€" something we're both not so good at.'_ with a soft rise of her lips, she flew as closely behind him as she could without crashing into Toothless' rear.

After what seemed to have been hours, but in reality had been only minutes, they landed on a precipice which protruded from a rather peculiar, unseen island. The blonde warrior creased her brows. Where had this new island come from? She swore just moments before, they had been at _Frigga's_ _Hearth_.

"I know what you're thinking." Hiccup began as he clambered off Toothless' back, a thick forest behind, the oceans roaring in front of them, "Where are we? Well, this island is quite a bit off our map â€" several miles west, to be honest."

Astrid, who, up until then, had still been seated upon Stormfly, decided it was time to jolt off the saddle and follow Hiccup further as said boy approached the first few trees.

"There are currents around _Frigga's Hearth_ that seem to be seasonal; connected to the weather, too, most likely. When Toothless and I took a flight around here we got caught and they catapulted us to this island."

"Still doesn't explain why we never found it..."

"The dragon's instinctively avoided it. Because of the unpredictable winds that come and go and the fact that they cannot reside here."

She frowned at that, halting next to him as his eyes wandered up the sturdy bark of a tree â€" it was covered in something thin and fluttery, but Astrid could not make out the details in this darkness.

"How did you find it, then?" She inquired, eyes slitting in order to see the trees better, but to no avail.

"I used to my flight suite."

That explained everything.

"So you _crash_-landed here." She could not hinder a grin from claiming her lips, and Hiccup simply chortled in response.

"More or less. We have to wait."

He turned around, facing the ocean again, whereupon the moon shone with radiance â€" it was a full, perfect circle of dim, ghastly light like how it only ever happened every twenty-eight days.

"During full moon, this place becomes even more beautiful, and I discovered something amazing then."

"You've...been here before? A few times?" Astrid raised a quizzical eyebrow; when had he been missing?

Well, seeing as they did not live in the same house, and at night she tended to sleep, he might as well have been flying about, all carefree, and she would have been none the wiser. That thought somehow irked her; he usually always took her along. Why had he decided to go on his own, then? And why did he only just show her this place now?

"Yes, I had to...make preparations." He sounded nervous. That, in return, made her nervous.

'Oh Gods...' What should she think?

The lights shifted and began to filter through the spaces between the trees, like water filling the gaps of its container. It flowed deeper, now allowing Astrid to recognize what strange substance covered the trunks " vines and flowers!

She gasped, "Those are..."

"Yes. Amazing right? Flowers on trees; and the colours! And they bloom at night." Without warning, Hiccup made his way through the forest. Astrid hesitated at first, but then decided to follow.

They trudged through the illuminated habitation in silence, only rattling grass and groaning trees bent by the winds interrupted them. Astrid concentrated on her steps; on the feel of soft soil and green stalks as well as small stones underneath her boots. She touched the trees, her fingers recoiling at first because of the mushy, soft texture. She then discovered moss to cover most of the flora here, vines snaking their ways around as if they were traps, and countless flowers bloomed with an intoxicating, sweet smell which fuzzed her senses.

"Where exactly are we going?" She panted after several minutes.

"Just follow." Was his only response.

Soon, the trees began to grow more closely together, making it harder to squeeze past them. Rocks were blocking her way, a few fallen logs and mounds of dead leaves. The smell of chlorophyll briefly stung her nose before it was replaced quite immediately by the pungent scent of exotic blossoms. Everything about this place seemed other-worldly to the blonde Viking; as if she were caught in a dream. She tried to focus on details; to inspect her surrounds with more attention, yet all the components of nature simply seemed to fade out of her mind. It was a hazed-over vision of translucent blues and purples, mixed with the brief knowledge that there was some red and green and maybe even brown in there if only the sun shined, but otherwise, nothing made sense.

She was in a different realm, so it appeared. It both allured her greatly, and intimidated her. Never would she let anyone realise that, though.

"We'll have to leave the dragons behind now." Hiccup declared, and it occurred for the first time to Astrid that both Toothless and Stormfly had been following them up until then.

A quick glance over her shoulder confirmed that, for she saw the

reptiles struggle to fit in between the wide, tall plants. There was no passing; barely so for the two Vikings themselves.

"They'll be fine." Hiccup reassured with a smile; at least, she believed he did. Within this darkness, everything was so hard to recognize, even her boyfriend.

"How much further?" She was holding tightly onto a rough rock, jumping over a small ledge as Hiccup smoothly slid between the obstacles as if he had been here too many times to not know the way.

Which, according to his narration, was the case.

"Not much." And with that, he came to an abrupt halt, having his girlfriend stumble into his back with force.

But he did not fall, which surprised her. He stood and laughed lightly, turning to look at her, "Do you trust me?" He suddenly asked, and his brows creased, lips thinning as he became so uncharacteristically serious.

"Always." The response was a reflex; she did not have to think about it, for the answer was as evident as night and day. Of course she did.

"Then close your eyes." But now she hesitated.

"You want me to-"

"Don't worry, I'll guide you. I want to show you something. Close your eyes."

She could not argue. This mysterious place, with its mind-bustling fragrances and queer flora obviously had a grander, more spectacular secret. This was a surprise just as much as her mother's axe had been one on her fifth birthday; when she had covered her eyes with her hands and guided her downstairs. Astrid remembered how she had jumped around the living room, all jolly and excited, not being patient enough to test out the blade against a worthy opponent.

Only the situation was different; a lot more thrilling, frightening, exciting.

Her eyes fluttered shut the way they did when he leaned in for a kiss, and his hand grasped hers softly, tugging the woman along. She stumbled at first, but found her footing quite quickly as squishy earth squeaked underneath her boots. Astrid wondered how the dragons were fairing; were they worried? Would they be there when they returned? She could hear neither a squawk nor a warble. Was her worry even worthwhile?

"Nearly there." Her boyfriend now whispered, pulling more urgently at her hand and somehow forcing her in front of him.

She felt the heat of his breath tickle the nape of her neck; his hands gliding from her fingers to her waist, pushing her softly.

She gulped. Astrid's thoughts raced once more, tumbling and falling all over each other in one messed up heap of nonsense when suddenly,

without a single warning, Hiccup's raspy voice echoed at her right ear with resonance and a tender side to it only _she_ ever got to hear, "Open your eyes; slowly."

He should be aware of her maddening heart-pace. It drummed like a cacophony of singing Terrible Terrors; it must have. Her lungs vibrated with its tune.

Gradually, those eyelids crept up, letting moonlight softly enter her field of vision.

And steal her breath away.

In front of her was something so mesmerizing and fascinating, she was _assured_ _this_ had to be a dream so vivid she would tell Hiccup the moment she woke up.

But it was not. Every pinch to her arm, every light tap on her face was _real_. Every breath she took; the smells that so perfectly mingled and soothed her senses in the sweetest ways. It all was immaculate, and _real_.

There was a pond in the middle of the tightly cropped forest. Trees loomed around its perimeter, those same ghastly flowers decorating their boles with countless blossoms that curled and hung lackadaisically from their thick tendrils, having the grand plants completely entrapped. Grass sprouted at the edges, small, moss-covered rocks protruded from the clear gurgle of fresh water and the moonlight seeped through the gaps of the leaves in streaks of light, illuminating only spots of the scene.

The pond-water glistened in a million different dancing colours " from deep maroons to magenta and pink, yellow and amber, a warm orange, a cold blue, a deep indigo like Astrid's eyes and a sparkling emerald like those of Hiccup. Purple, copper, rouge " every hue the blonde Viking knew to exist was present within the reflection of the tranquil liquids.

The reason for that being the countless, small spots of light that floated like feathers above the pond, falling, rising, spinning, twisting, glowing.

"What _is_ that...?" Astrid whispered in astonishment, her oculars large and rounded, her body stiff, her heartbeat a mess she could no longer care to analyse.

"Look more closely." Hiccup encouraged, tugging at her fingers as he neared the spectacular show of illumination.

With courage she need not gather first, seeing as curiosity won out, Astrid took carefully measured steps towards the water's edge, scared any rapid movements would frighten the lights away. She felt the need to tiptoe and to still her breath, which was impossible. She was panting. As the lights fluttered more closely to her eyes, Astrid began to recognize a form all too familiar.

"Fireworms!" She whispered harshly, her lips forming a smile as she inspected them with allure.

Indeed, the smallest dragons she knew to exist fluttered with ease,

eyes seeming pupil-less yet focused, misshapen wings swinging speedily as long bodies glided like spineless leaves. Their scales radiated in the intensifying colours. It reminded her of the Flightmare, during Arvindal's fire when it drank from the algae; the same kind of effect, just stronger, more vivid_. _

"Yes, but not quite" Hiccup had his arms crossed in front of his chest, pride filling his stature as he observed as Astrid ogled the minuscule reptiles which weaved around the air as if they weighed nothing, "They must be a related kind; they have the same head and body, but different wings, are much smaller, and...well..different colours."

"How do they _do_ that?" She twisted her head, arching her neck, trying to gain a new perspective, but no answer was found, only further mesmerization.

"We'll have to study them more closely to find that out."

Taking a step back, Astrid once again took in the sight in front of her from a more distant point of view; to capture the entire beauty of the moment. It was indeed out of this world, but it touched her heart in ways she did not know were possible. It warmed her, made something swell and tickle.

"Hiccup, this is..." She could not find the terms.

"I know...I can't describe it either." He uttered, leaning into her from the side as his fingers stroked her own appendages, "Astrid."

There it was. That serious tone again; the one that had deeper implications buried within it. Gradually, the female turned to face her counterpart, both excited and worried as to what might follow. She did not dare consider her earlier thoughts, whilst they had been flying to this place, for they would just cause her brain to shut down completely.

"I..." Their eyes met; his viridian orbs were full of emotions unspoken, full of intention, full of determination. She could only wait and breathe as he tried to articulate the right words to get across what he desired, "I thought about this for ages." He chortled, making her tense shoulders loosen with his laugh.

He was being Hiccup, and she had to smile. Somehow, somewhere within that abnormally rapid heart of hers, she knew what was to come.

"I...ever since I've become chief, I realised a few things. Like that...I'm missing out on a lot of stuff I did before â€" all the _goofing off, _as you would put it."

She shook her head with an amused smile on her lips, his hands intertwining with hers, holding them firmly now.

"I'm not flying as much with Toothless anymore, who, himself, has a lot of alpha-duties to come after. And...I...we don't map the world that much, or at all, and all the...the...places we visited and adventures we had. I realised they all...were trials. To test me as a leader, to shape and strengthen me. Like a sword in a smithy. What

I'm trying to get at is..." he was flustered, his neck burning as he loosened one hand to scratch the nape of it, eyes darting around nervously, "I'm missing out on things, and I understand that life is changing; everything is changing, and I have to accept that I'm a grown man now with new responsibilities and new priorities. But I don't...I don't..." His mouth clamped shut, his head lowered as he shut his eyes briefly to catch himself.

Astrid, as she tended to do so often, stooped down onto his level, catching his re-opening orbs with the firmness of her own, "You don't what?"

His viridian oculars seemed verdigris in the light; they bore themselves into hers, an incredible amount of emotion present within them. It was only now that it dawned on Astrid what exactly this emotion was.

Love.

"I've been missing out on you; the one thing I can't go without. Even before...we became this close. When...when we were younger; you were always the reason I tried to hard. Why I never gave up. I wanted to impress you, I wanted your attention. I admired you from the day I first laid eyes upon you; and in all honesty, I still do." His smile was tender, endearing, his voice soothing and strong, "You remind me of everything I am, Astrid Hofferson, of the reason I fight and why I want to live. So right now, I want to confess that I cannot imagine a life which you are not a part of."

She raised herself, and so did he.

It was more than obvious what his most mind-weighing, life-changing question was. The gist of it was there; the outline had been drawn, the implications made. Now only the question remained; the summary of everything Hiccup had already summed up.

"I think in some cultures men bow down on a knee or something." He chuckled, eyes not losing hers, "But I've got a handicap, as you know." She giggled in response; something she did not do often, but could not help it at that moment as her grin broadened and her eyes began to shimmer, "Astrid, do you want...to stand by me during all my chief trials, to help me decide Berk's future, to form this tribe accordingly and...watch over the next generation with me?"

"Hiccup." Astrid shut her eyes, her smile not faltering as she suppressed a laugh, "Just say it before you faint."

She nearly jumped when his lips came into contact with the shell of her right ear; he whispered with carefully paced words "Do you want to marry me?" and lingered for several seconds as her breath hitched.

As he stepped back, inspecting her mimicry for a response, he only saw glee. Utter, unwavering glee and unadulterated love.

"What do you think?" She challenged, smirking all of a sudden.

"I think you'll either say yes, or punch me in the guts."

At that, she burst out laughing, tears accumulating at the corner of

her eyes as she doubled over, her hands sliding out of his grasp. Astrid did not quite comprehend why she was finding this situation so terribly amusing when, in reality, it was the sweetest and most precious moment of her life; one she would remember for eternity, and definitely tell her grandchildren about more than twice.

"Yes!"

Correction: their grandchildren.

"To the proposal or to punching me in the guts?" With a furrowed brow, Hiccup took a well-measured step backwards, causing Astrid to laugh even harder as she tried frantically to catch her breath.

Her stomach ached terribly from all the contractions, "Hiccup, you are inveterate!" she chuckled, biting her lips to stop the flow of mellifluous sounds of merriment.

Indeed, this moment was blissful. Hiccup had, by all means, chosen the perfect setting to confess his feelings and ask for her hand in marriage. After all the terrifying thoughts that had assaulted her during their flight here, this possibility had never crossed her mind.

Sure, many had suggested they should get married, Stoick even calling her his future daughter-in-law; the thought itself had, in all actuality, often enough surfaced during her daily pondering, as early as when they began dating many years back. Yet Astrid had discarded it straight away. Not that she feared or loathed marriage; but she always appeared to herself as too young, such thoughts too important, and life too full of other, more intriguing matters to break her mind over the 'what if's' of the future.

This came as a surprise, but also not. That blend of situations was a perfect one; for it made it easier for her answer to come forth.

"To the proposal, you idiot!" Once more she shook her head at him, staring at his face as if he were the only existent living being beside her.

A breath he did not know he had been holding escaped in one rapid flow as he swung his arms around her and hugged her tightly. The blonde Viking returned the embrace with just as much force, before they separated enough to share meaningful, deep kiss.

"You are a hopeless romantic, Hiccup." Astrid whispered as they separated, before she kissed him anew.

"Anything for you, Milady." He laughed, nuzzling her neck eagerly.

Her fingers glided through his hair, cheeks hurting from all the smiling she had been doing for the past few minutes, or hours, as it felt, "You did ask my father, didn't you?"

Slowly, he distanced himself to look her into the eyes, his eyebrows raised as if that were an important factor he had forgotten, until a grin broke out on his lips and he laughed again, "Obviously. Weeks ago!"

She punched his arm, causing the man to wince, but she did not feel remorse, "You devious, little â€" _weeks_ ago!?"

"Yeah. I've been planning this since shortly after...after I became _chief_." He shrugged, his eyes reminiscent, but his stature one of amusement.

"How many people knew?" How could she have missed it? He must have made preparations; and when he talked to her father, where had _she_ been? No one had made any indications except for the obvious, daily jibes. Was she _that_ dense? Or oblivious? Both? Where was the difference?

"Many. But thankfully, sometimes, Berk can keep a secret." He shrugged with nonchalance, kissing her delicately on the forehead, a blue and red Fireworm descending in front of their visions.

Astrid briefly paid them attention before she looked back at her now-fiancÃ©.

The twirling reptiles seemed to remind Hiccup of something, for his face lighted up with memory as his hand flew into his pocket, where he rummaged around frantically.

"What're you doing?" Astrid questioned, placing a stray lock of golden hair behind her ear as she observed him with curiosity.

"Hang on." He dived for his other pocket, frowning as he seemingly could not find the desired item he searched for, "Got it!" He pulled out his fist, grinning the goofish, Hiccup-way she knew all too well.

She concentrated on his countenance at first, a loving expression marred on her own before he opened his appendages and revealed to her two neatly cut, glimmering rings.

A brow rose questioningly. When he twisted one of the rings in his hands, she discovered an intriguing pattern, similar to Deadly Nadder scales, as well as the faint colours of green, blue and orange. In the middle of it was an even more sparkly crystal of sorts.

"I heard it's traditions to put on rings; to mark us as engaged, later, married, to all who ask. Usually it's just normal golden rings, but I thought that would be a little boring, so I tuned them a little." Hiccup smirked as Astrid's large eyes stared in mesmerization at him, then back at the two jewels.

"Hiccup â€" _wow!_ Look at the _details!_ How did you-" She cut herself off, carefully fingering the ring he held towards her.

"Ah, well, melted a few resources together and used a fine needle, hundreds of tries, and a small sapphire. I had asked Trader Johann for all the stuff, which he eagerly bought to me three weeks ago."

"I cannot recall you spending a lot of time in the workshop." She twisted her head challengingly at him, but he just kept his grin as he gently took her hand, sliding the cool material over her ring-finger.

"You weren't always around to know what I was up to, were you now?" With a wink, and a roll of her eyes, Astrid grasped the spare ring. It was just as beautiful, with darker, red and obsidian patterns that glimmered just as much. Something green was also in there.

Taking his hand with purpose, she mimicked his actions and placed the ring accordingly, before she eyed her own one with as much attention as she could, considering the scarce source of light. Astrid could not help but smile merrily; it was just _so Hiccup._

"So it's official now." She whispered before her teeth bit down on her lower lip.

"Well, I'll announce it during the next meeting at the Great Hall; as protocol demands."

"When do you _ever_ follow protocol?"

"From time to time, you know, when people least expect it." He chuckled at her, and she laughed back.

"You really _are_ _inveterate, Hiccup."

* * *

><p>AN:** Here it goes! I want to thank you all for bearing with me; for favouriting, for alerting, and especially, for also reviewing my work. As you know, I really do love reviews and appreciate every word you sacrifice the time to write for me. It means a lot to me to hear from my readers; to talk to you and know you are there, enjoying this work as much as I am. I write because I love writing, but I also write for you guys, so it would be awesome if you could pipe up every now and then so I know how you are feeling._

_That said; how did you find Astrid's...well thoughts on what Hiccup was going to do? In many fanfictions, Astrid is presented as the rather bold, straight forward "I-don't-mind-sleeping-with-you" kind, but I slightly twisted things here, and want to know what you think of that? I guess I just like to keep this traditional, seeing the time and moral codex they had back then, even though that really is just my own interpretation. The whole ring-thing just felt right, and I know they actually had those back then, even though only during the wedding, not before, if I'm not wrong. _

Bare with me as I try to figure out Viking marriage-rituals - we all know it will come in movie 3! And that will then be DW's interpretation...

So yeah, this is the last chapter I had typed up already in a raw state. I will need some time to work on further updates, I hope to manage the next one soon, so please, please bare with me! And it would really, really make me happy if you reviewed, too! I expect no essays, haha, just a word or two :) Thanks my dears! Don't forget your Hiccstrid and Gronckle plushies on the way out~

End
file.